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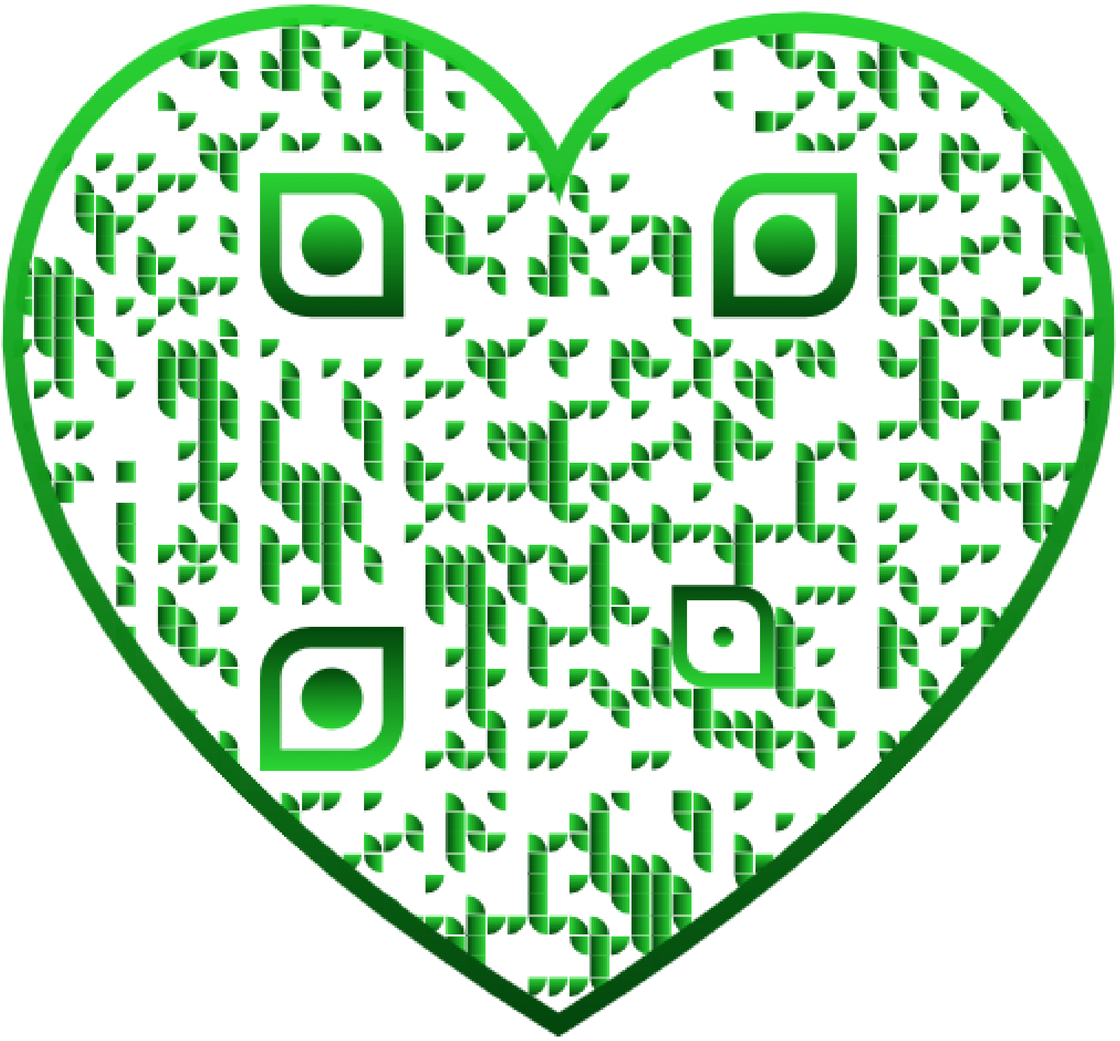

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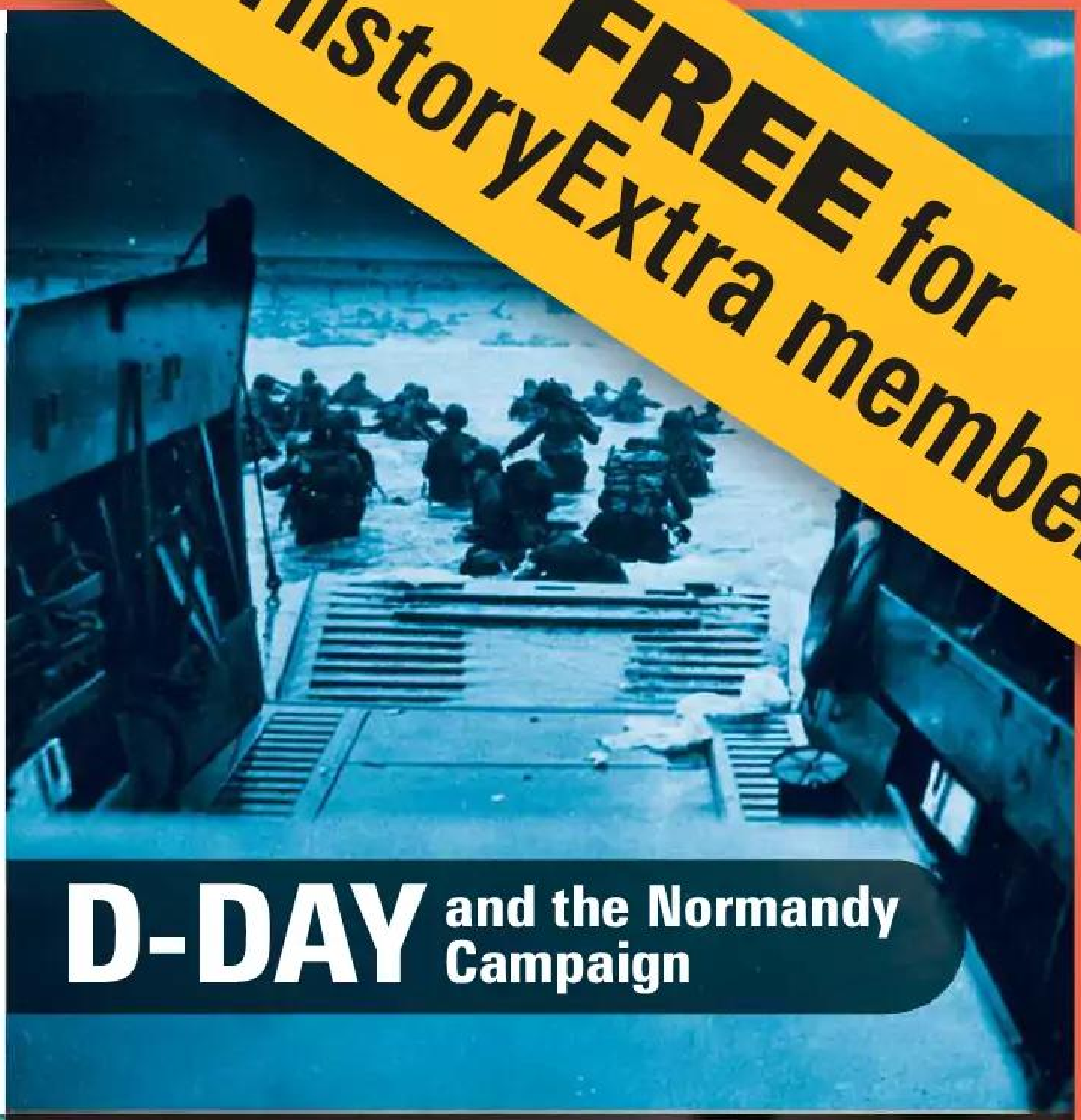
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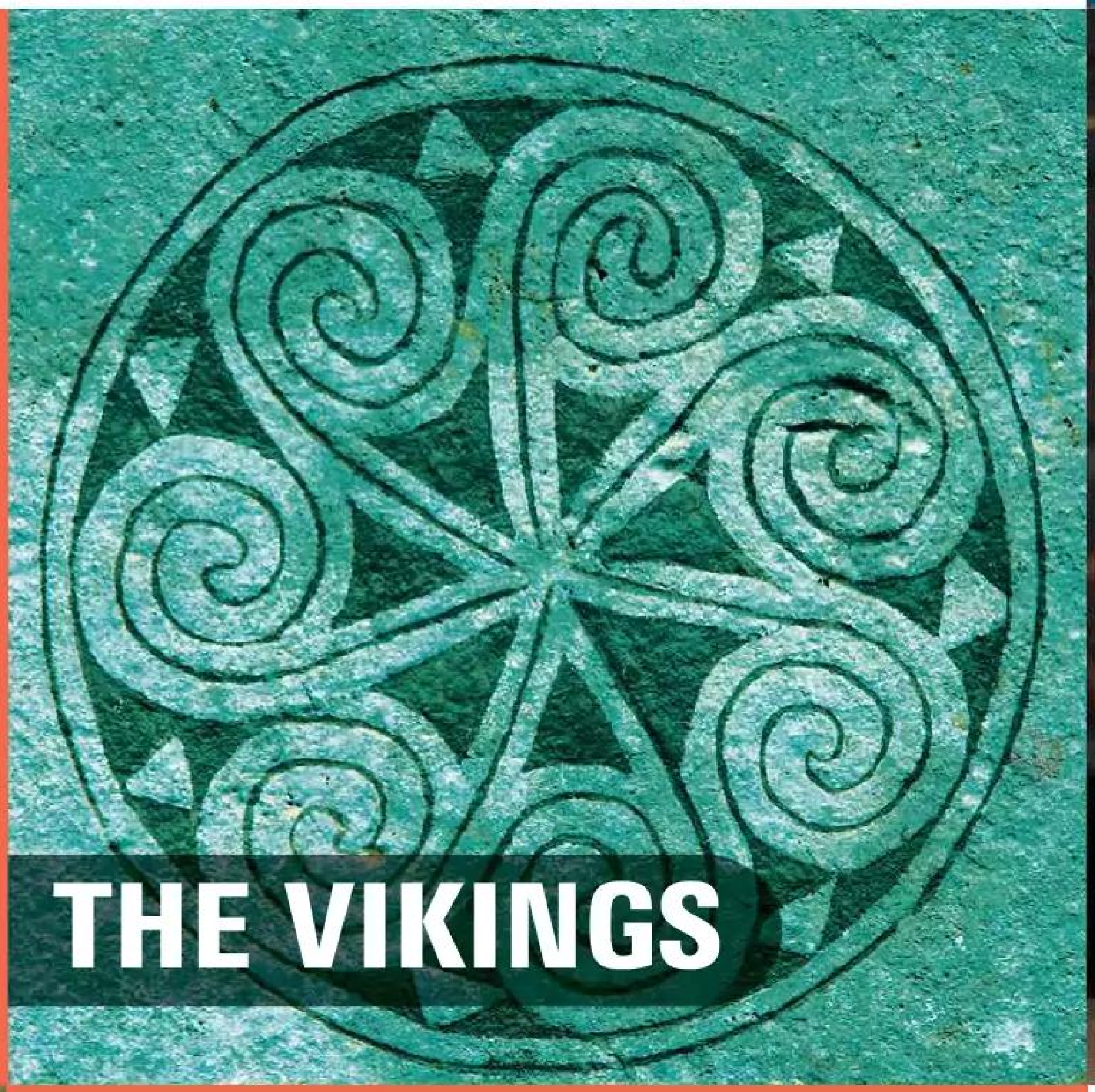
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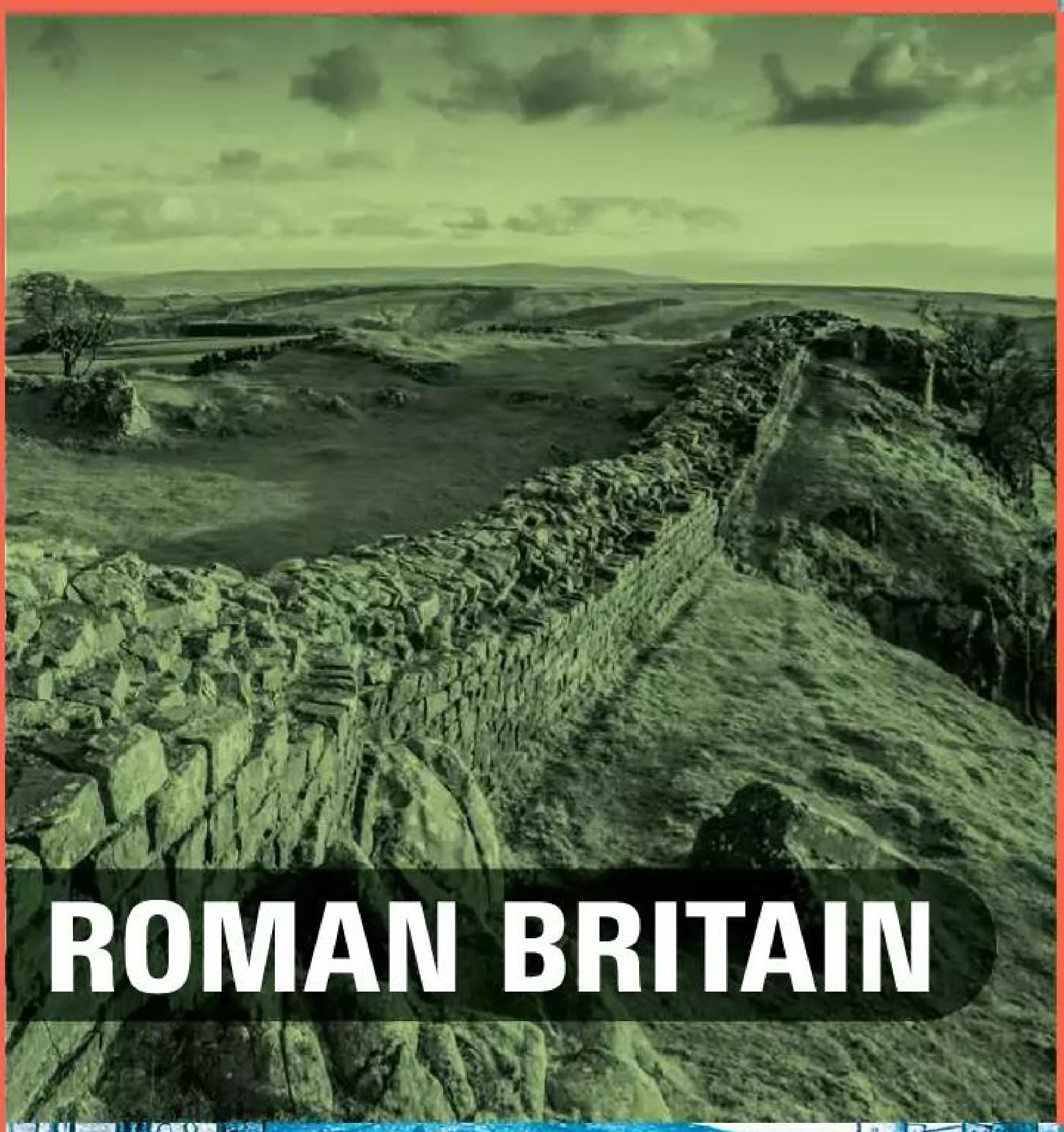
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THE COLD WAR

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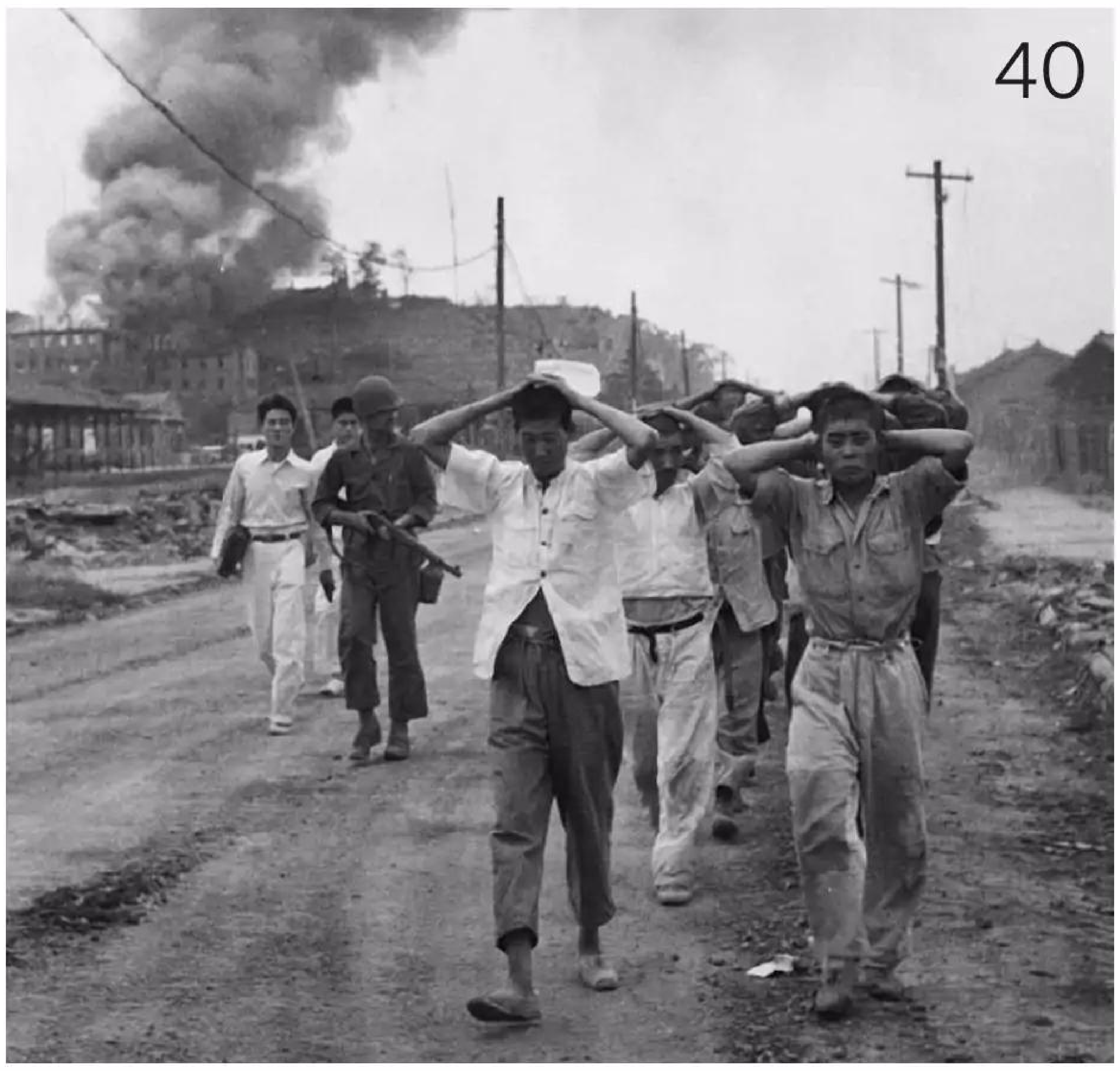

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I'M
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"Are we in a second Cold War? Some commentators would like to think so"

BY **MICHAEL GOODMAN**

People often date themselves by important events. Successive generations can recall where they were when they heard about the declaration of war in 1939, almost certainly crowded around a radio in their living room. Others can recall where they were when President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, when they learned of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997, or when the Twin Towers were struck in 2001. Some people use other metrics – mine tend to be either football World Cups or significant wars. For many people alive today, one of their most defining memories was the end of the Cold War, signified most famously by the millions of people who congregated in November 1989 to witness the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Cold War was many things to many people. First and foremost, it was a way of life – the division of Europe in the summer of 1945 affected millions of people, and its shadow would hang overhead for the best part of 45 years. Much like the preceding 'world war', the Cold War was global, stretching from Asia to Africa, from Australasia to the Americas. Europe was the heartland of the conflict, but tensions stretched from the Arctic in the north, via the Antarctic in the south, and all the way into space. There was little that couldn't be perceived via a Cold War lens, and little that remained unaffected.

The Cold War was a military conflict. The very term 'cold war' signified a conflict that fell short of outright 'hot' fighting, but was, nonetheless, full of tension, fear and battle readiness. That doesn't mean that there wasn't fighting; there absolutely was, just not directly between the two main Cold War protagonists, the United States and the Soviet Union. Instead, the wars tended to be 'proxy' conflicts, fought between third parties often equipped and supported by the two superpowers. Many of the contributions to this special edition highlight the varying dimensions of this: from the tensions and very real concerns about direct conflict over the placing of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962; or the conflict in Korea in the early 1950s, fought between communist and capitalist forces; to the Soviet war in Afghanistan of the 1980s, where the resistance fighters were trained and armed by the US. Tensions ran high, and there were a series of flashpoints where direct war felt close, but even in the periods of relative calm and peace, both east and west amassed vast nuclear and conventional arsenals.

The Cold War was a political conflict. At the root of everything was the ideological battle between communism and capitalism. For this reason, there is some

A 45-YEAR SHADOW
LEFT West Berliners crowd in front of the Berlin Wall on 11 November 1989 as East German border guards open a crossing point MIDDLE Military power on parade in Moscow, 1957 RIGHT American forces do battle on the ground and in the air during the Vietnam War (1954-1975)

debate as to the precise origins of the Cold War. For many, 1945 signified the start of serious tension, yet placing things in an ideological context the more appropriate start is the Russian revolution of 1917. The victory of communism in Russia brought about a call to arms, an ideological conquest to export around the globe, a move to expand globally. In theory, that meant no space for capitalism to survive. There were certainly some rapprochements, such as Nixon's efforts in China in 1972, but ultimately the ideological conflict meant that tension was never far away.

The Cold War was an economic conflict. Ideology was based around communism versus capitalism: two rival economic approaches. One was based, simply put, in the ability to make profits; the other, on an ideal of collective work and equality. Within these were expressions of freedom and the question of how tightly controlled the economy was by central government. For ideologues such as Karl Marx, the father figure of communism, the battle was an economic one. Marx famously wrote about 'historical materialism', the idea that history was all about the 'means of production' rather than ideology. Separating communism into politics and economics was impossible though: the two were entirely interwoven.

The Cold War was a conflict driven by espionage. Number one priority for the west throughout the entire Cold War was having advance knowledge of the 'threat'. This could be broken down into two areas: intelligence on 'intentions' of the opposing side and what they were going to do before they did it; and intelligence on 'capabilities', knowledge of military systems, the size of the armed forces, the Order of Battle. Intelligence was often key. In the early 1980s, for instance, it was British intelligence that first spotted the strange Russian reaction to military exercise Able Archer. Thanks to a well-placed source, Oleg Gordievsky, the British PM and US president changed their tone and language towards the Soviet leader, with great effect.

The Cold War was a colonial conflict. This is arguably a more controversial perspective, but the Cold War coincided, fed into and fed upon colonial legacies. For Britain, rapidly retreating from empire after the Second World War, newly independent countries posed fresh challenges, many of them seen through a Cold War prism. No less significant was the protective blanket of Pax Americana, the term adopted after 1945 to symbolise the US dominance in the west. Beyond this, particularly in Asia and Africa, a great many nations were propped up (in every sense) by the US. The Soviet Union, too, was an empire: Russian control emanated from Moscow and even though the vast majority of Soviet bloc states had governments in their own right, they were militarily, politically and economically beholden to the Kremlin.

The Cold War was a cultural conflict. 'Culture' means different things, but in this context, we can think about the daily lives of individuals. In Germany, families were torn apart, and although many were allowed to travel from west to east, it was harder to move in the other direction. Culture was also present in the films, music, books and television of the Cold War. For every James Bond and the Beatles in the west, there were lesser-known equivalents in the east.

The Cold War ended over 30 years ago. There are politicians, spies and military leaders now in power who don't have first-hand memories of the conflict – yet its legacy has never been more significant. The 1990s were a decade characterised, perhaps ironically, by Europe being at war for the first time since the Second World War. Despite this, the idea of an existential, state-based threat, was no longer present; something that had underpinned almost the entirety of the 20th century. In 2001, non-state actors became the number one security concern for east and west alike. Fast forward 20 years, and we are back in the midst of state-based threats. The prospect has arisen, once more, of conflict with Russia. Are we in a second Cold War? Some commentators would like to think so. But while there is undoubted tension between the old Cold War foes, the ideological and economic battles of 1945 don't exist. Learning from the past is always instructive: even if history isn't likely to repeat itself, understanding what happened will surely help ensure the same mistakes don't get made again. ●

The Cold War was many things to many people. First and foremost, it was a way of life

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From the rise of Marxism to growing nuclear fears, explore the story of how the Cold War came to life on the global stage

COLD WAR ORIGINS

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HOW WAR TURNED COLD

Why was it called the Cold War? Was it inevitable? And who won? We answer these key questions and more about the decades-long rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union

BY **MICHAEL GOODMAN**

→

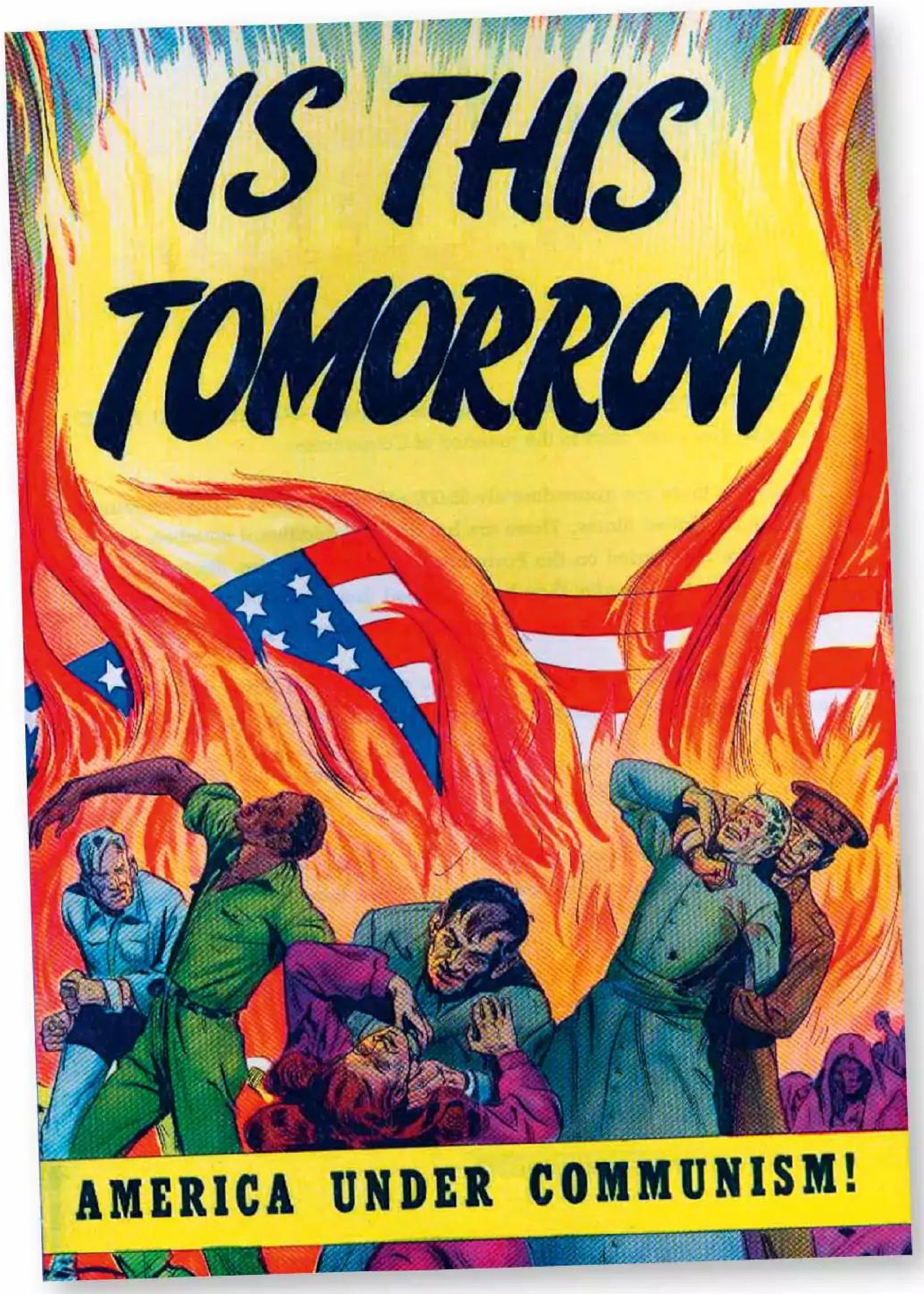
1

What was the Cold War and why do we refer to it as such?

Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at the Yalta Conference, 1945, to discuss the postwar reorganisation of Germany and Europe

To put it simply, the Cold War was a political, ideological and economic conflict that broke out in the years after the Second World War and lasted up until 1991. The two main protagonists were the United States and the Soviet Union, along with their respective allies (the western and eastern blocs). Of course, it was much more complex than that.

As to the name: a war will turn 'hot' when it involves open fighting, whereas a 'cold war' is a battle of ideology. The Cold War of the second half of the 20th century did, in various instances, become a physical conflict as there were lots of wars by proxy, such as in Korea and Vietnam. But fundamentally it remained peaceful and certainly was not what the two world wars had been.



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What were the ideologies of the two opposing sides?

The United States, and its chief ally Britain, were capitalist and democratic countries, while the Soviet Union was a communist state – the first significant communist country to come out of the First World War. The Soviet ideal was an internal system for making life more equitable and level, but more broadly there was a belief that if communism was to succeed then the Soviets would have to export that mentality to other countries around the world.

So, in the interwar years – particularly after Joseph Stalin came to power – the idea of a global communist revolution took hold. This was strongly opposed by the west, but the two sides would become allies in the Second World War. In the aftermath of the war, Soviet expansion took on a renewed vigour and became more overt: not just in a political-ideological way, but increasingly in a military way, too. The east and west became embroiled in a battle for ideas, for people, for land and for territory. Later, this battle would become characterised by the threat of nuclear war.

An American propaganda poster, dated c1920, offers an alarming depiction of life under communist rule. Long before the Cold War, the US sought to halt the spread of the ideology

ALAMY

Construction work starts on the Berlin Wall on Bernauer Strasse, east Berlin, in 1961

3 Was the Cold War inevitable after the Second World War?

The answer to this question is more complex than a simple 'yes' or 'no'. On one level, there were substantial differences in the aftermath of the Second World War that had not existed at any previous time in history. Take Germany: the four great powers who had won split the country into four zones, with the capitalist nations (the United States, Britain and France) combining their zones into what became West Germany.

The Soviets took East Germany. So, in one country, there was a stark division in politics, ideology, economy and allegiances. The hope that these two sides of Germany could live perfectly harmoniously was, at best, naive.

But one issue that pervaded the Cold War was trying to understand what was going on: the perception versus reality. One of the main difficulties that the west faced after the war was knowing what the Soviets were up to.

The Kremlin was fearful of an invasion; a common fear for the Russians as they had been invaded from the west numerous times in the preceding centuries. American, British and other western diplomats began focusing on the question 'Is Stalin trying to expand the communist revolution outward, to make states to the west of the Soviet Union communist?' Or was his intention, as others believed, to create a buffer zone between Germany in the centre of Europe and the Soviet Union?

Events from 1947 onwards made the Soviets show their hand, and that's when the Cold War became a more crystallised conflict.

4 How long after the start of the Cold War did the public know it was happening?

Between the end of the war in 1945 and 1947, not much happened. Countries were preoccupied with their own economies and with other forms of rebuilding after years of destruction. The big change came in 1947.

First, there was the Truman Doctrine, launched by US president Harry Truman in reaction to what he perceived as a communist threat to Greece and Turkey. This was essentially a promise that the US would come to the rescue of any country who was fighting political oppression. It didn't name the Soviet Union directly, but it was a clear statement of intent.

The Truman Doctrine was followed a year later by the Marshall Plan, named after the then-US secretary of state George Marshall, which promised enormous amounts of economic aid to these countries.

What you had with both of these was a political commitment to defend Europe (and other countries) against the Soviets. This was followed one year later with the creation of Nato.

So, by the late 1940s, the public was certainly aware that there was a growing antagonism between the US and the Soviet Union, if not a conflict.

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Greek dockers unload sacks of American flour provided as part of the Marshall Plan

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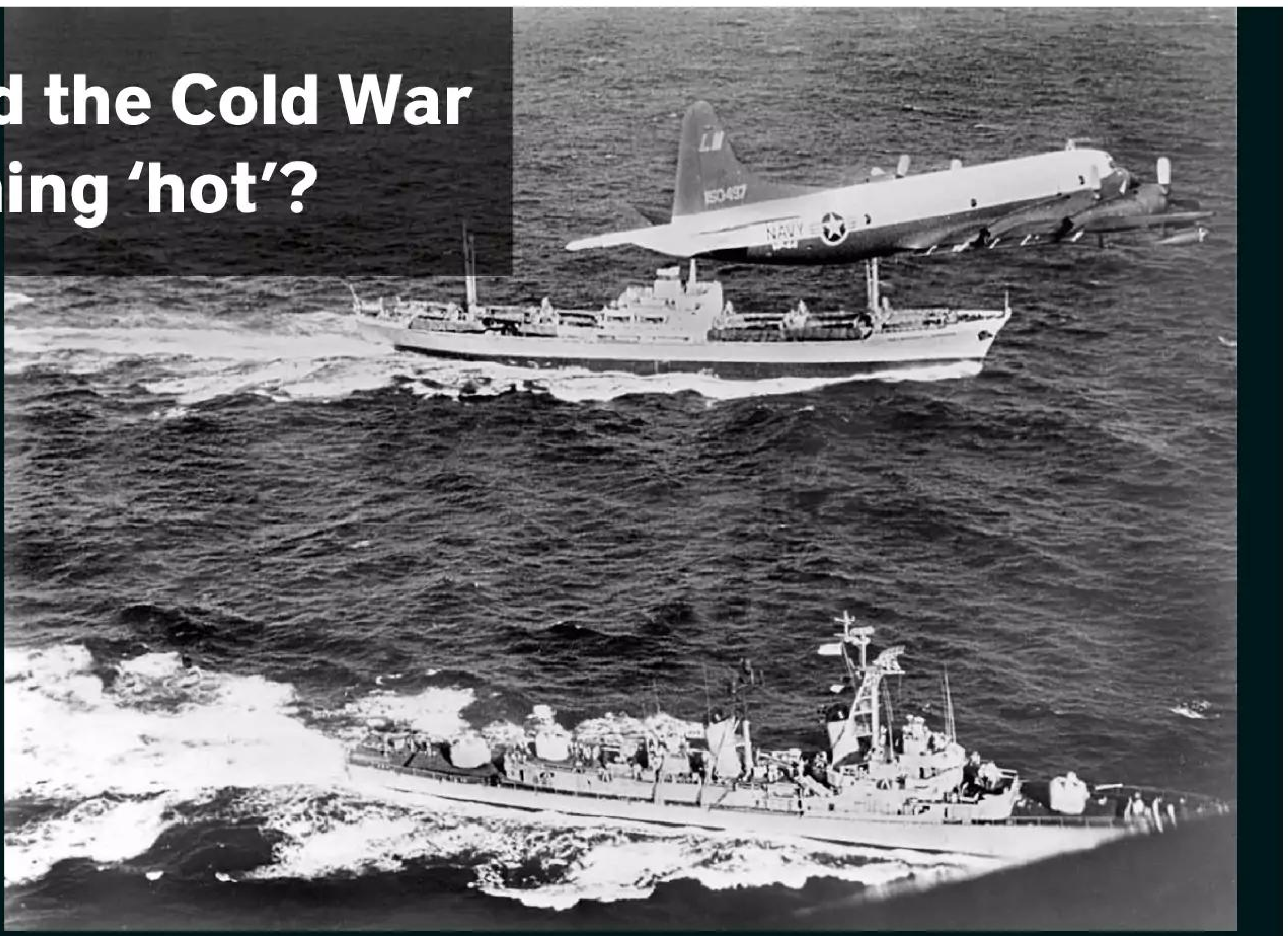
5 How close did the Cold War get to becoming 'hot'?



The US destroyer USS *Barry* (bottom) and a Navy plane escort the Soviet freighter *Anosov* (top) away after the conclusion of the Cuban missile crisis

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Arguably, the prospect of a nuclear war was actually less close than people appreciated, and feared, at the time. But a fundamental concern during the Cold War was misperception: if one side got it wrong in their judgment of what the other was up to, it had the potential to lead to a severe miscalculation that would result in a direct war – a nuclear war, at that.

The closest that they came was the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. This was a reasonably short-lived episode where the Soviets secretly transported a huge number of nuclear missiles to Cuba, an island around 100 miles off the coast of Florida.

Cuba was a communist country led by Fidel Castro, a great friend of the Soviet Union. After American intelligence spotted the missile sites on the island, a tense 13-day standoff followed. There were calls for an invasion, and, famously, Curtis LeMay, who at the time was chief of staff of the US Air Force – a characteristic, cigar-chomping Air Force man – just said, "Let's bomb them!" [Although, it's not clear that this quotation relates to the Cuban missile crisis specifically. Most cite LeMay as stating "Let's bomb them back to the stone age" with regards to Vietnam, or, in his own autobiography, about Japan in the Second World War.]

Fortunately, saner heads prevailed. Under President John F Kennedy, there was instead a blockade, which stopped more Russian ships getting in, and clandestine negotiations began. Eventually, an agreement was reached whereby the missiles would be dismantled and removed.

The Cuban missile crisis was regarded at the time as the moment the world stepped back from the brink, and is still remembered as such to this day.

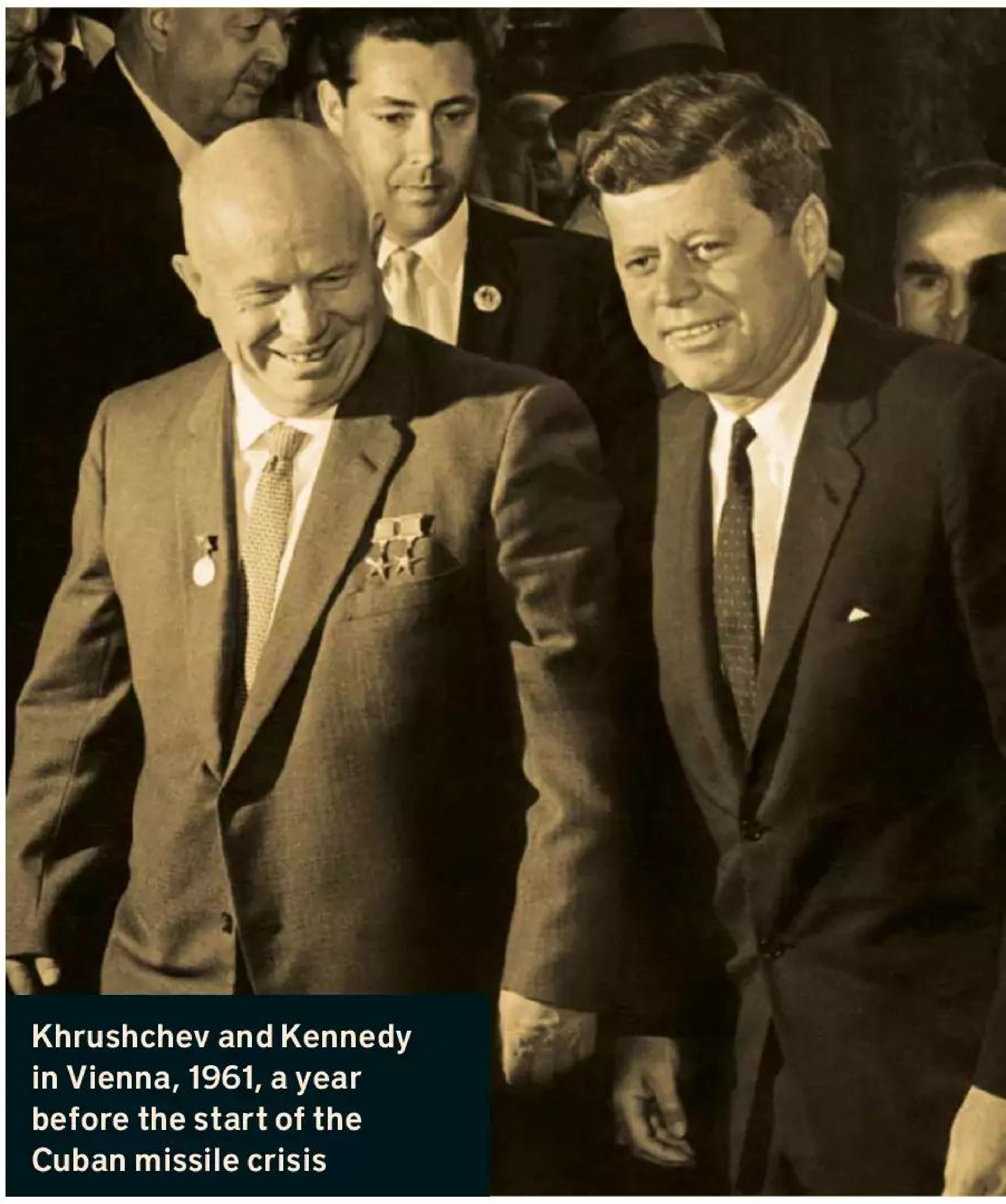
6 How did the US resolve the Cuban missile crisis?

It is with the benefit of hindsight that there is a greater understanding of the stand-off between Kennedy and the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev. The latter was notorious for using bluff as a main method of dealing with people, so he was unlikely to back down publicly in October 1962, despite the scale of the American anger at having missiles so close to their mainland. There was a great sense that this could all-too easily lead to an escalation of the Cold War.

Yet the tense situation was diffused with help from a Soviet spy: a colonel in military intelligence named Oleg Penkovsky, who passed information to the Americans and British about the missiles and the Soviet nuclear programme. Thanks to this, the Americans knew that Khrushchev's policy was based on bluffing, and that the best way of dealing with a bully like that was to stand up to him.

That's what Kennedy did, and Khrushchev backed down. In return, the Americans secretly agreed to remove their missiles in Turkey, the presence of which had partly prompted the Soviets to send missiles to Cuba in the first place, in a sort of quid pro quo.

One intriguing detail, which didn't come out until the 1990s, was that in addition to the missiles that the Americans had known about on Cuba – and had tracked and watched being dismantled – the Soviets had actually managed to get some tactical nuclear weapons onto Cuba. These were never spotted by the Americans.



Khrushchev and Kennedy in Vienna, 1961, a year before the start of the Cuban missile crisis

7 What was the significance of espionage in the Cold War?

Policymakers in both the east and west continuously supported and financed their intelligence communities throughout the Cold War; clearly it was felt there was a great need for the information they provided and the misinformation they spread to the other side.

There were a number of episodes that were a direct consequence of the information gained through espionage. For example, technical intelligence acquired by the Soviets – such as blueprints during the Second World War from a variety of different scientists – influenced the way they built their atomic bomb.

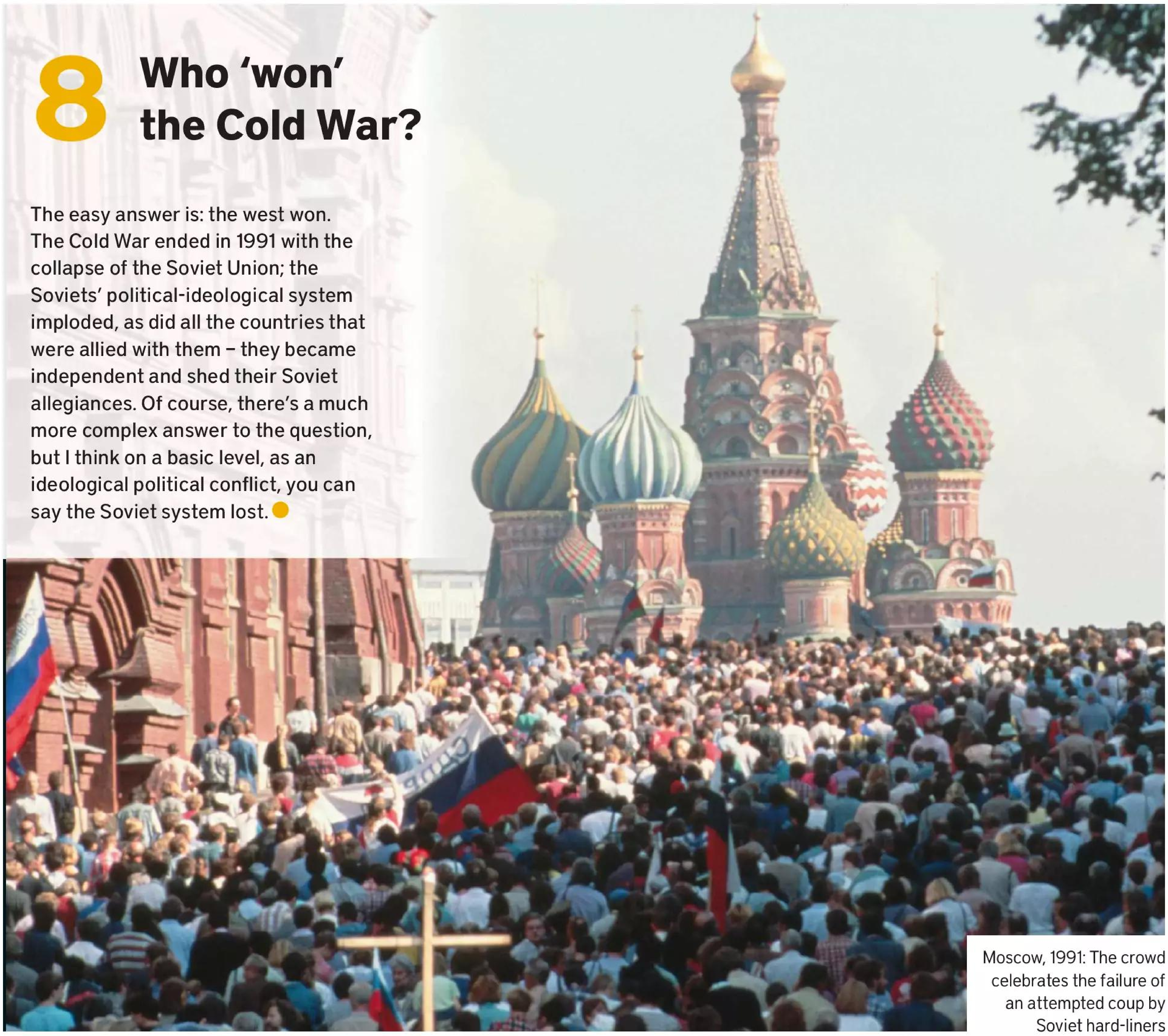
Then there was the intelligence passed on to the British by Russian double-agent Oleg Gordievsky. In particular, he was good at sharing information about the mentality of the Kremlin. In the early 1980s, Leonid Brezhnev, leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 until his death in 1982, was by then an old man and hugely paranoid that the west was going to launch a nuclear strike.

Gordievsky's intelligence prompted Margaret Thatcher to tone down her rhetoric about the Soviets and also to convince Reagan – with whom she had developed an extremely close relationship – to change his speeches. So, this is a key example of where you can almost draw a direct line between espionage information and a change in policy.

Soviet double agent Oleg Gordievsky would later help Britain and the US make tricky policy decisions in the 1980s

8 Who 'won' the Cold War?

The easy answer is: the west won. The Cold War ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union; the Soviets' political-ideological system imploded, as did all the countries that were allied with them – they became independent and shed their Soviet allegiances. Of course, there's a much more complex answer to the question, but I think on a basic level, as an ideological political conflict, you can say the Soviet system lost. ●



Moscow, 1991: The crowd celebrates the failure of an attempted coup by Soviet hard-liners

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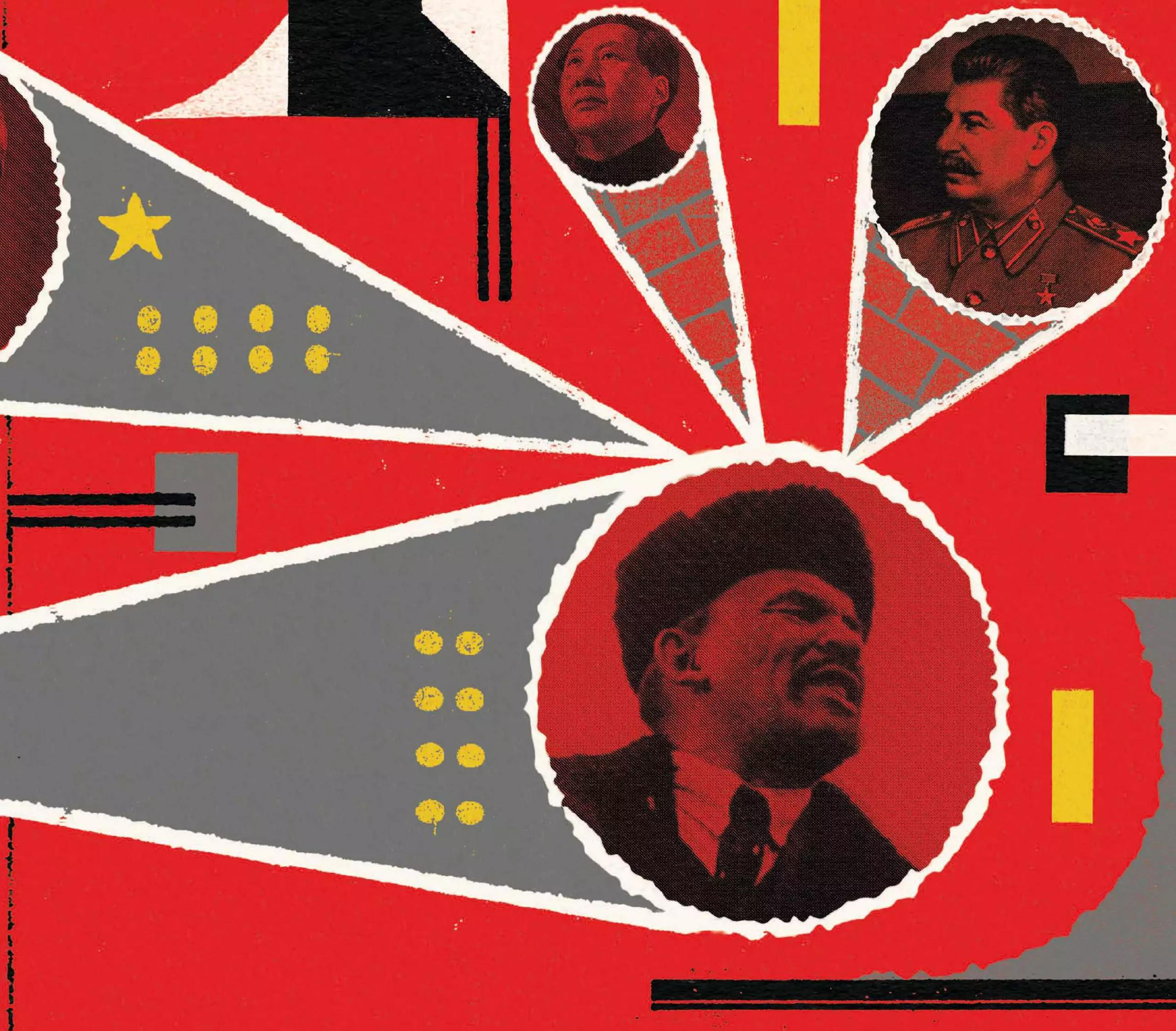


THE GODFATHER OF REVOLUTION

Just how did a poverty-stricken dissident become one of the most influential thinkers in the history of the world? Here we chart the seismic impact of Karl Marx and his writings

BY **GREGORY CLAEYS**

ILLUSTRATION BY **BEN JONES**

→

Karl Marx opened his most famous work, *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, with a chilling prophecy. "A spectre is haunting Europe," he declared. "The spectre of communism." This was a great exaggeration: there were few communists anywhere, and the revolutions erupting across France, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian empire and elsewhere that year were not led by them. By 1917, however, with the overthrow of the Russian tsar Nicholas II and the subsequent coup of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Marxist communism truly was a force to be contended with.

And after Mao Zedong's 1949 revolution in China, for a time more than half the world's population was ruled by principles notionally derived from Marx. In paintings, on banners and statues, the fierce grey-bearded face looked out upon the world as if to say: "I made this happen – or, at any rate, explained why history made it inevitable. Go forth and follow my example." And millions did.

Just how and why Marx became the most influential writer ever is well worth reflection. Born on 5 May 1818 in the small German town of Trier near the French border, in his early years Karl was distinguished by his single-mindedness, ambition and passionate determination to make a decent life for all humanity possible. Indeed, in 1869, while in Hanover playing a Victorian parlour game called Confessions, he described his "chief characteristic" as "singleness of purpose".

Marx studied law at Bonn, then philosophy at Berlin, his world view heavily influenced by the most famous philosopher of the day, Hegel. By 1843 he was a radical journalist working in Cologne, and in 1844–45, partly through the influence of Friedrich Engels – another Hegelian, one who would become a lifelong intellectual companion – he converted to communism. This was, he believed, the only solution to the dire plight of the emerging industrial proletariat in Britain and elsewhere.

Soon after, Marx and Engels laid out their new 'materialist conception of history' – explaining how capitalism originated, and why the system of property ownership, and the concentration of wealth, was the key to understanding any society. But, in 1848, their lives were turned upside down by a wave of revolutions. As unrest convulsed the continent, Marx was arrested (on the charge of financing the revolutionary movement) and exiled from Brussels to Paris. He was later forced across the Channel to London, where he arrived in June 1849 and remained the rest of his life.

A helping hand

In exile, initially in Soho, Marx endured dire poverty for many years and was often reliant on a helping hand from Engels, who was employed in his father's cotton-spinning firm in Manchester. Marx's faithful wife, Jenny von Westphalen, bore seven children, of whom four died young. He is also thought to have fathered a child by their servant, Helene Demuth. The child, Frederick Demuth, was given up for adoption, with Engels declaring paternity (in a bid to save Marx's reputation from his many detractors).

Most of Marx's 34-year residence in London was spent researching and writing his great work *Capital* (in German, *Das Kapital*) usually in the great domed British Museum reading room, which opened in 1857. Much of what he described in *Capital* (1867) was gleaned not from personal experience but from the 'Blue Books' that included inspections of British factories. These detailed the progress of industry, mining, trade and agriculture, often revealing oppressively long hours of labour and dire working conditions.

The wealthy could profit from capitalism's crises, argued Marx. The poor, however, went to the wall

He also used the press, at one point retelling the tragedy of a London milliner Mary Anne Walkley, who died, aged 20, of exhaustion, having commonly worked 30 hours at a stretch during the 'society season'. Medical reports were another source for his work – one from 1875 revealing that the average life expectancy for the upper middle classes in Manchester was 38, while for labourers it was 17.

In London, Marx was also active among the local German workers and played an increasingly central role in the International Working Men's Association, founded in 1864, which eventually had several hundred thousand members across Europe. When, at the end of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), a working-class revolt produced the short-lived Paris Commune, Marx was widely associated with its aims, and the bloodshed that ensued. He was soon, Engels remarked, "the best-hated and most calumniated man of his time".

For all the criticism, Marx rarely doubted his own abilities. But his extraordinary self-confidence had a flip side: a desire to master every aspect of a subject before writing on it. Years passed with innumerable hiatuses learning new languages, notably Russian, and taking endless notes. In old age, Marx was afflicted by haemorrhoids, rheumatism, carbuncles, liver and skin ailments and insomnia, and so for lengthy periods could scarcely put pen to paper. Due to these delays, he wouldn't achieve global renown in his own lifetime. His death in 1883 went largely unnoticed.

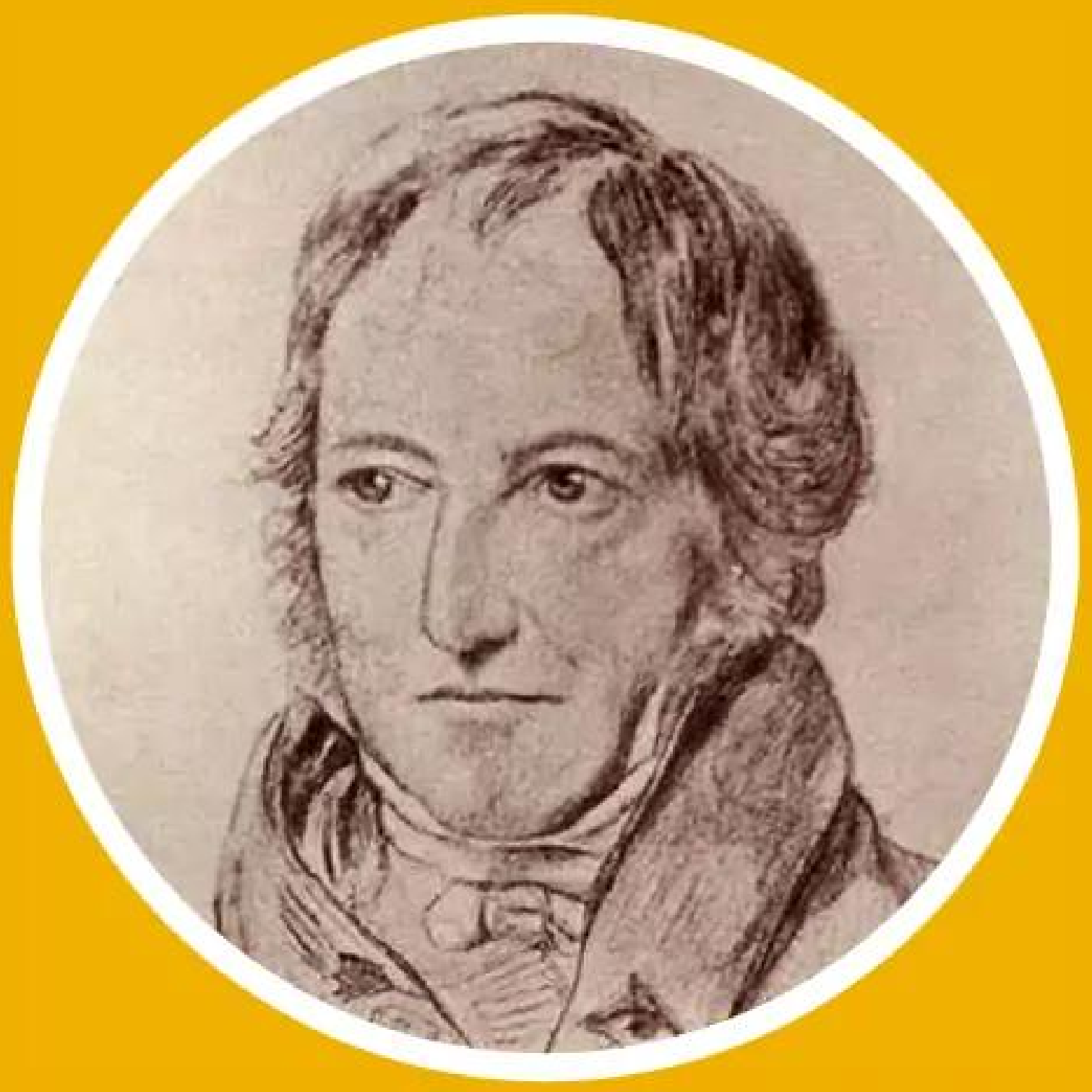
Soon, however – with Europe in the grips of an economic depression and socialism on the march across the continent – a cult quickly began to grow around him. Within 20 years, the acuity of his vision of a world where the new powers of production would feed, clothe and house the working majority at a high standard of living had earned him international acclaim. He now towered above early socialist thinkers, men like Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon.

Marx is buried in Highgate Cemetery, London where, under a bust of his head, are engraved: "Workers of All Lands Unite" and the more reflective phrase: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it," taken from one of his early writings, the *Theses on Feuerbach*. They are fitting epitaphs. Marx was a man of action and that action was first and foremost intended to save the proletariat – the vast majority of humanity in an industrial society – from the greed and inhumanity of capitalism.

Going to the wall

Marx's scheme was at root relatively simple, and one that he had arrived upon by 1848. Capitalism, he argued, produced recurring

INCITING REVOLT
National Guardsmen in front of an artillery barricade in Paris during the conflict between radicals and the French Third Republic, 1870–71. Coming in the wake of the publication of *Capital*, this working-class revolt exposed Marx to a storm of criticism



THE INSPIRATION
A drawing of the German philosopher Georg Hegel, whose teachings on the evolution of ideas influenced Marx so heavily

THE FRIEND IN NEED
As well as being a great intellectual companion, Friedrich Engels offered Marx a helping hand when poverty struck

THE FAITHFUL WIFE
Marx's wife, Jenny, who bore him seven children, four of whom died young. Marx is also thought to have fathered a child by the couple's servant

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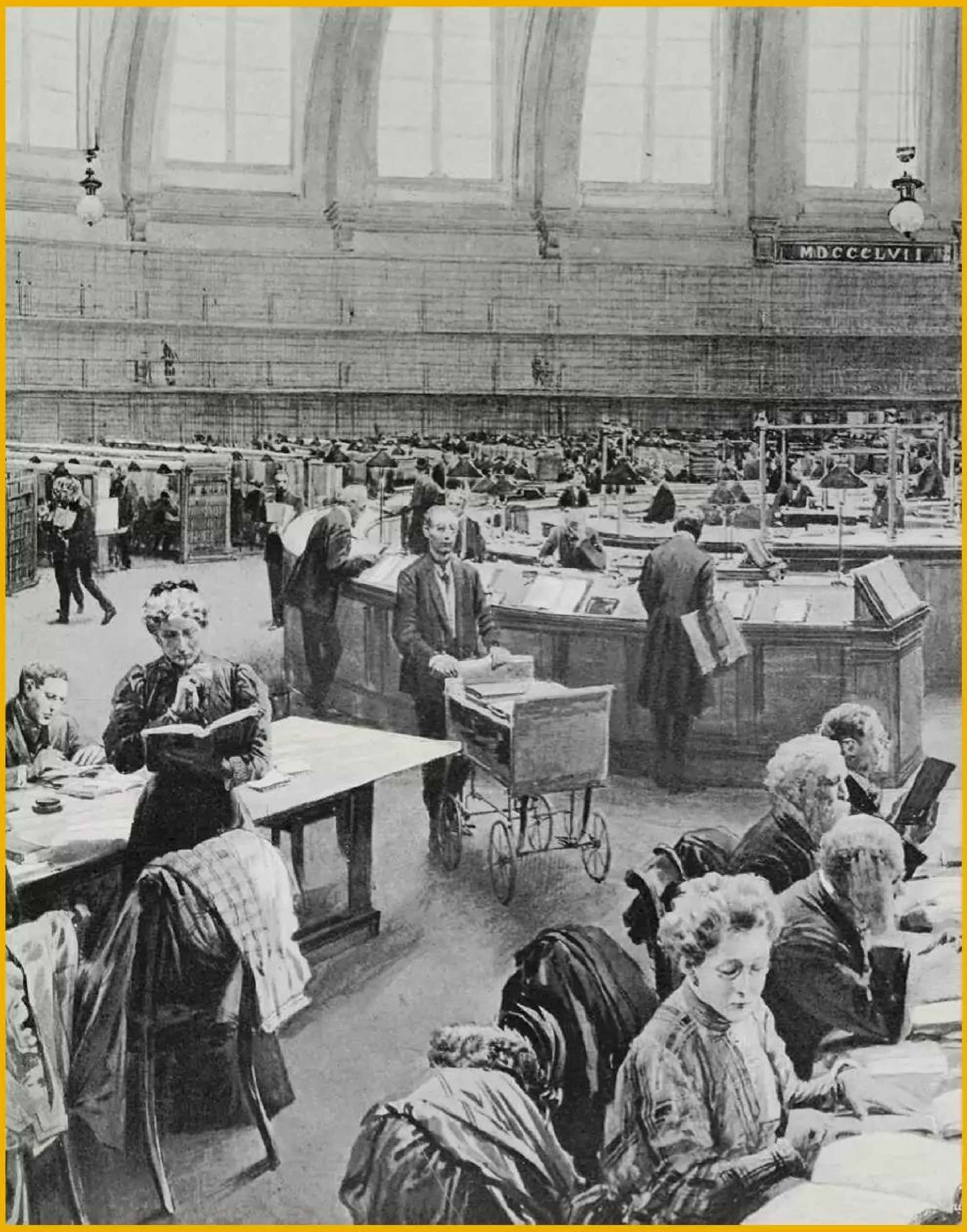
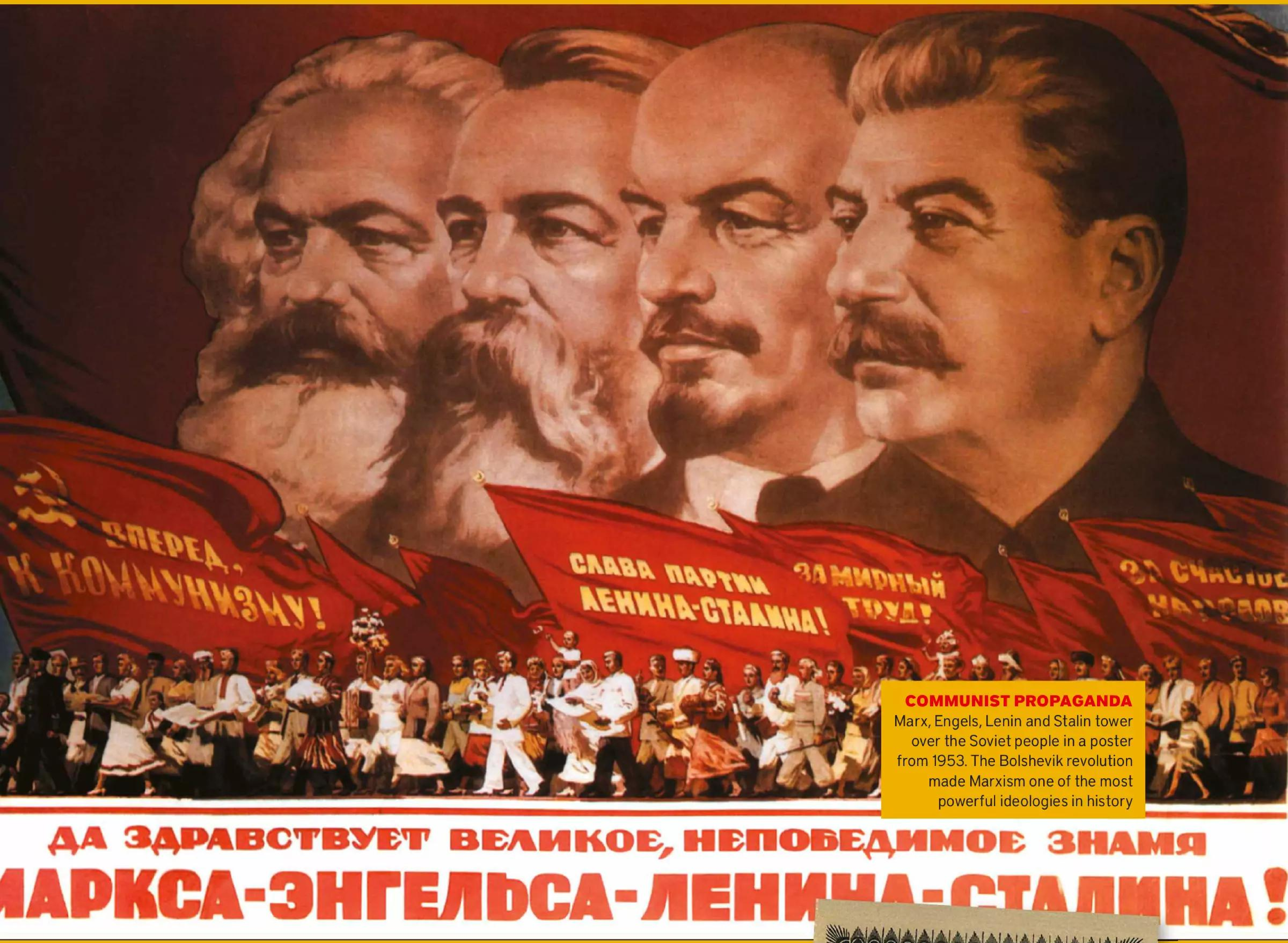


SEAT OF LEARNING
A 1907 drawing of the reading room in the British Museum. Karl Marx spent hour upon hour here, researching and writing his great work, *Capital* →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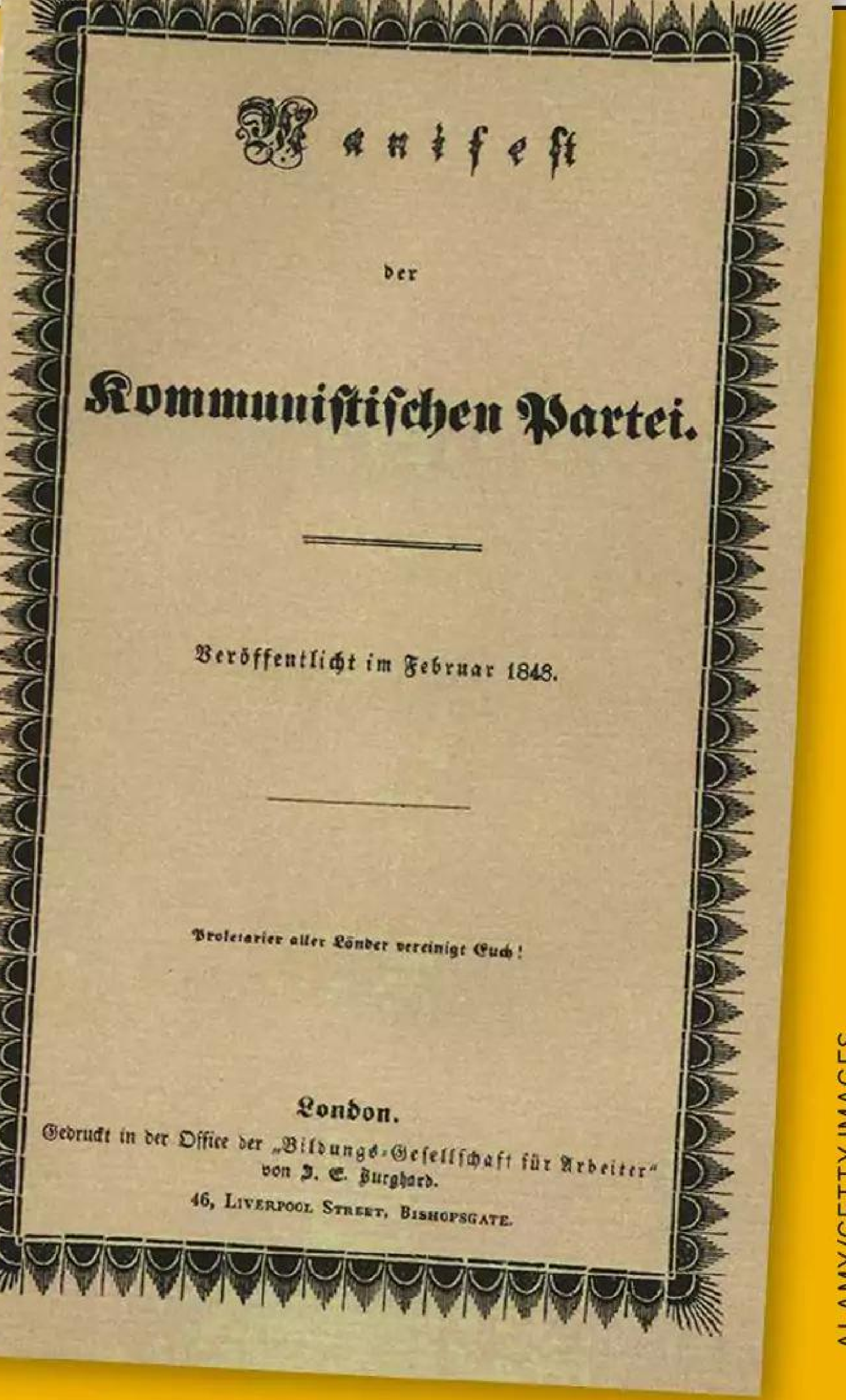
COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA
Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin tower over the Soviet people in a poster from 1953. The Bolshevik revolution made Marxism one of the most powerful ideologies in history

BLOODY RETALIATION
Czechs carry their national flag past a burning tank during an uprising against Soviet control in 1968. The Soviet response to the revolt would be brutal



Manifeſt

der

Kommuniſtiſchen Partei.

Veröffentlicht im Februar 1848.

Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt Euch!

London.
Gedruckt in der Office der „Bildungs-Geſellſchaft für Arbeiter“
von J. E. Burghard.
46, Liverpool Street, Bishopsgate.

A CHILLING PROPHECY
The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848, had a seismic impact on the world in the 20th century

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

crises. In each of these the wealthier could survive, and even profit – if need be by selling at the cost of production or even below. The weaker, however, went to the wall. Wealth tended to concentrate accordingly, while working-class wages sank invariably to subsistence levels, or even less.

Eventually one great crisis would occur in which the system would be overthrown by a working class now well-versed in the socialist alternative and bound together by the solidarity of class consciousness. This would itself be partly the product of the increasingly social, co-operative nature of large-scale production in factories.

After the bourgeoisie, or capitalist middle class, was overthrown, the working class would remodel society during a phase Marx occasionally referred to as the "dictatorship of the proletariat". By this he meant that manual workers (up to 85 per cent of the population in late Victorian Britain) would take democratic control. Production for profit would be succeeded by production for need, organised by centralised planning. Eventually, workers would be rewarded according to the principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

The state ceases

According to Marxist philosophy, an ultimate stage of communist society would be reached where coercive authority of all kinds would be virtually eliminated. Production and education would be closely integrated, and all workers would be overseen by elected, recallable managers paid an average wage. The state would cease to exist once classes had been abolished. All the while, the introduction of further machinery would provide much greater free time for all, now making possible the all-round development of all individuals, rather than only the educated few.

Marx later retreated from the more effusive comments of his youth about the "alienation" of the work-process itself, preferring to advocate greater leisure time for self-development and education. But he never doubted the practicality, or the virtues, of the overall aim: the ending of coercive exploitation.

It would be a full three decades after his death before Marx's theories were put to the test in the real world. And when they were – in the Bolshevik revolution that swept Russia in 1917 – they had a more explosive impact than surely even he could have imagined.

Near the end of his life, Marx had conceded that revolution might take place in an undeveloped country, notably Russia. This was problematic, as Marx had modelled his theories on a nation with a high standard of living. But what really detached the Bolshevik revolution from its Marxist template was that it was led by a minority party – one that felt compelled to rule by terror.

Marx had certainly not projected the dictatorship that emerged in Russia with Lenin, Stalin and the infamous secret police. And nor could he have foreseen the speed with which Bolshevism super-charged the adoption of his ideas around the globe.

In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), Lenin took Marx's theory of exploitation to another level by implying its extension to all the world's conquered and occupied areas. After 1945, seizing the opportunity revealed by the bankruptcy of most of Europe's great empires, millions began to associate Marx's name with national independence and self-determination, and the return of land to the peasantry. For these people, Marx was now a beacon of the essential equality, dignity and potential wellbeing of all humanity. This was to be achieved in an atmosphere of solidarity, harmony and mutual assistance rather than competition and mutual antagonism.

> **For millions, Marx was now a beacon of the essential equality, dignity and wellbeing of all humanity**

The regimes that bore Marx's name went some distance towards fulfilling these ideals. Millions in China were raised from poverty, freed from opium addiction and released from the thrall of vicious landlords. The USSR succeeded in industrialising in only two generations, albeit at terrible cost. It also did much to assist in Hitler's defeat. And despite massive destruction in the Second World War, it achieved a relatively high standard of living and even briefly surpassed the United States in the space race, when Yuri Gagarin became the first man to travel into orbit in April 1961.

For a time during the Cold War, the loyalties and affections of vast swathes of humanity were torn between the more affluent western capitalist democracies, led by the United States, and their Marxist-Leninist and Maoist critics who claimed that, such was the power of corporations and the wealthy, capitalism simply couldn't be democratic.

Across the world, people applauded attempts to break free from the stranglehold of international capitalist domination, notably in Cuba, where Che Guevara became the great symbol of the age of student revolt, and in Vietnam where the US seemingly supported a corrupt and reactionary regime.

The rediscovery of the works of the young Marx, and particularly the theory of alienation in his 1844 'Paris Manuscripts', helped to shape the framework of the New Left in the 1960s and lent Marx a reputation as an anti-Stalinist.

Mass disillusionment

But communist states, too, failed to provide genuine popular control over increasingly ossified, privileged power elites, and frequently oppressed all dissenters. And when attempts to break free of the Soviet model were brutally suppressed in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, mass disillusionment ensued. Communism now seemed, in the words of the French student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, "obsolete".

In China the Cultural Revolution targeted the educated, of whom thousands were killed, and many more exiled to the countryside for a decade. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, in large measure due to its inability to keep up the arms race with the USA, the bankruptcy of Marx's model seemed assured. Capitalism had evidently won the titanic struggle of modern ideologies. Marx was relegated to a footnote on folly in the chronicle of humanity's endeavours.

In the years following the 2008 financial crisis, however, a renewed interest in Marx was evident. An increasing concentration of wealth and growing poverty seemed to be making his analysis relevant once again – especially to a generation raised on austerity and facing worse life prospects than their parents had. No longer a spectre, Marx at 200 may yet provide a few surprises.

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NUCLEAR FALL-OUT

In 1945, the USSR was an ally of the west in the fight against Nazi Germany. But a mere 17 years later, the two sides stood poised to obliterate each other in a nuclear apocalypse. This, from a feature first published in 2016, is the story of how a relationship turned ugly

BY **DAVID REYNOLDS**

SHOW OF STRENGTH
The USSR showcases its military might at the 1961 annual May Day parade in Red Square, Moscow. Khrushchev's deployment of 36 R-12 medium-range thermonuclear missiles to Cuba precipitated 1962's Cuban missile crisis

We call it the Cold War, but in October 1962 the world seemed about to incinerate. The Soviet decision to install nuclear missiles in Cuba triggered a crisis with the US that threatened a global holocaust.

How had it come to this? Two decades earlier, the US and the USSR had been allies in the defeat of Nazi Germany. In March 1943, *Life* magazine lauded the Russians as "one hell of a people" who "look like Americans, dress like Americans and think like Americans". As for the NKVD (Josef Stalin's dreaded secret police), *Life* declared it was "similar to the FBI".

Three crunch issues lay at the heart of the ensuing Cold War: ideology, geopolitics and nuclear weapons

In reality, though, the wartime alliance had been a marriage of convenience. The "main bond of the victors", admitted Winston Churchill, had been "their common hate" towards Hitler's Reich, but this no longer held them together after 1945. Three crunch issues lay at the heart of the ensuing Cold War: ideology, geopolitics and nuclear weapons.

Ideologically, America's mantra was 'liberty' – 'free enterprise', limited government and democratic localism. Socialism and communism were minority movements in the USA, easily stigmatised as 'un-American'.

In the USSR, Marxist-Leninist ideology predicted the imminent crisis of imperialist capitalism, leading to a dictatorship of the proletariat – of which the Soviet communist party constituted the vanguard. Although playing down the rhetoric of world revolution by the 1940s, Stalin remained keen to accelerate the process of historical change. The chaos caused by the Second World War offered plenty of opportunities.

In fact, the conflict transformed the geopolitical position of both countries, sucking them into power vacuums created by the defeat of the Axis powers. These in turn became flashpoints of the new Cold War – above all, in Germany, China and Korea.

The USA and the USSR occupied Germany to defeat Hitler and then stayed to shape the peace. The Soviets had lost perhaps 27 million people from 1941–45, around one-seventh of their population, and were now determined to prevent the revival of German military power. But America and Britain were equally determined to get the country on its feet again and off their backs. In 1948, the US, Britain and France cut through the diplomatic deadlock and began to create a West German state out of their zones of occupation. They also introduced a new currency, the Deutschmark, which almost overnight got goods into the shops. Stalin hit back by blockading West Berlin, which the western allies could only reach through Soviet-occupied eastern Germany.

President Harry Truman had no doubt that remaining in Berlin had become "a symbol of the American intent" in Europe. And so, in tandem with the RAF, the US Air Force mounted a round-the-clock airlift of food and fuel into the beleaguered city in the winter of 1948–49. At its peak, Berlin was handling more air traffic than New York.

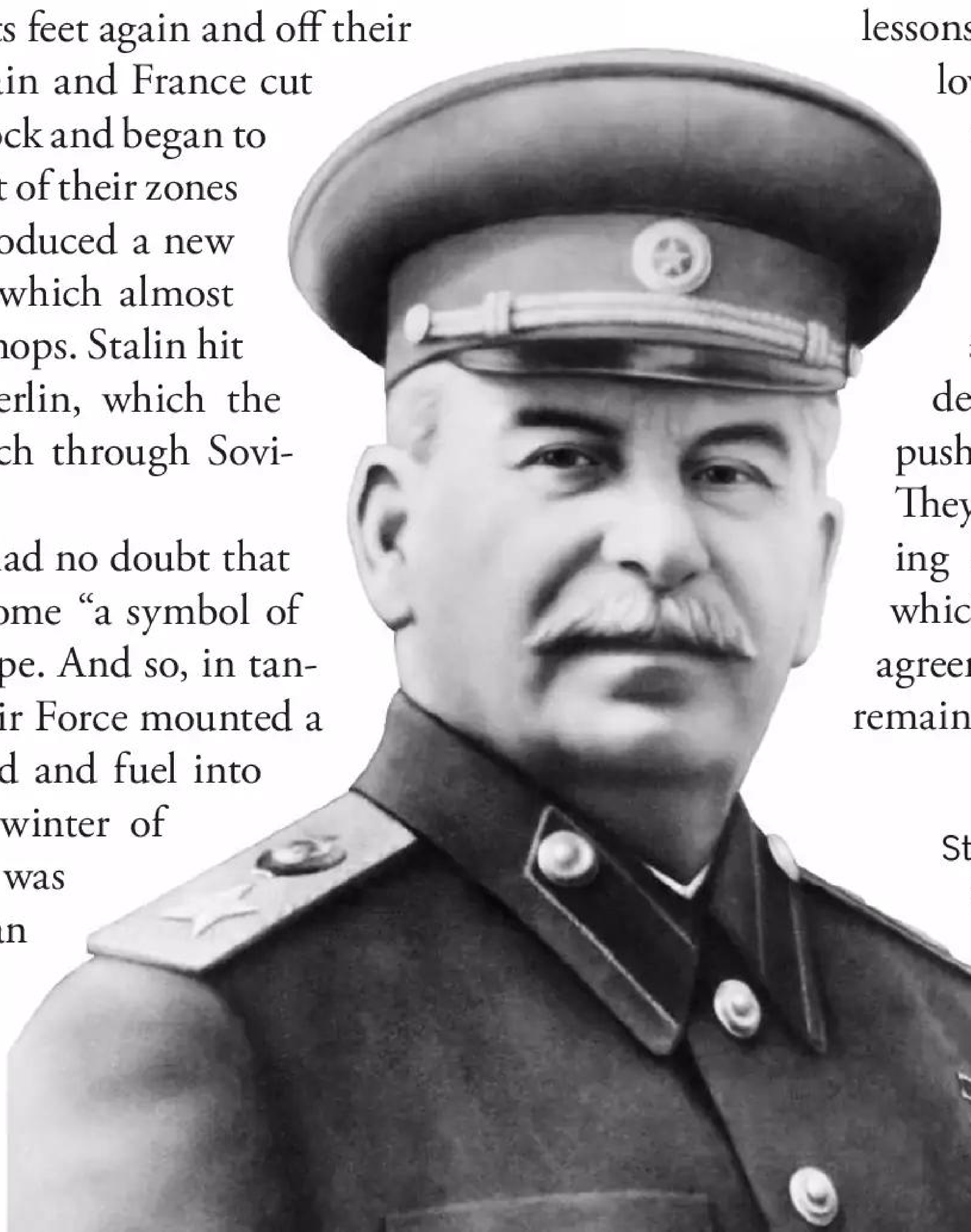
The 'air-bridge' not only broke Stalin's blockade, it also transformed West German attitudes to the Americans and British. Former enemies were now becoming allies, while the wartime allies were turning into adversaries. The blockade also widened the rift between the USSR and the other three victor powers. In April 1949, the US signed the North Atlantic Treaty with Canada and 10 European states, led by Britain and France. Stalin's gamble in Berlin had boomeranged, drawing the west into an unprecedented transatlantic alliance.

Yet the global 'correlation of forces', as the Soviets called it, shifted again the following year. In October 1949, China's three decades of civil war ended in total victory for Mao Zedong and the communists. The world's most populous country had gone 'red' – arousing alarm and recrimination in America.

Attack and counter-attack

An even greater shock followed in Korea. In 1945, Japanese forces had surrendered to the Soviets in the north and the US in the south. As in Germany, neither superpower was willing to withdraw. But their clients were determined to unify the country, and in June 1950 Stalin gave the green light to the North Korean leader Kim Il-sung to attack the south, thinking the west would not react. This was Stalin's second gross miscalculation in two years: as with Berlin, Truman saw Korea as a vital symbol of US will and power. He judged that "communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese had acted 10, 15, 20 years earlier". The lessons of appeasement seemed clear: "If this was allowed to go unchallenged, it would mean a third world war."

Truman committed US forces to Korea, enlisting the support of key allies, including Britain. The Korean War proved a yo-yo affair, with the North Koreans initially driving deep into the south before US counter-attacks pushed them back almost to the Chinese border. They in turn provoked China to enter the war. Fighting finally stabilised around the 38th parallel, which became the basis of an armistice in 1953. This agreement remains in force today in a country that remains divided.



Stalin capitalised on the many opportunities that arose following the chaos of the Second World War, but it also saw him make some gross miscalculations

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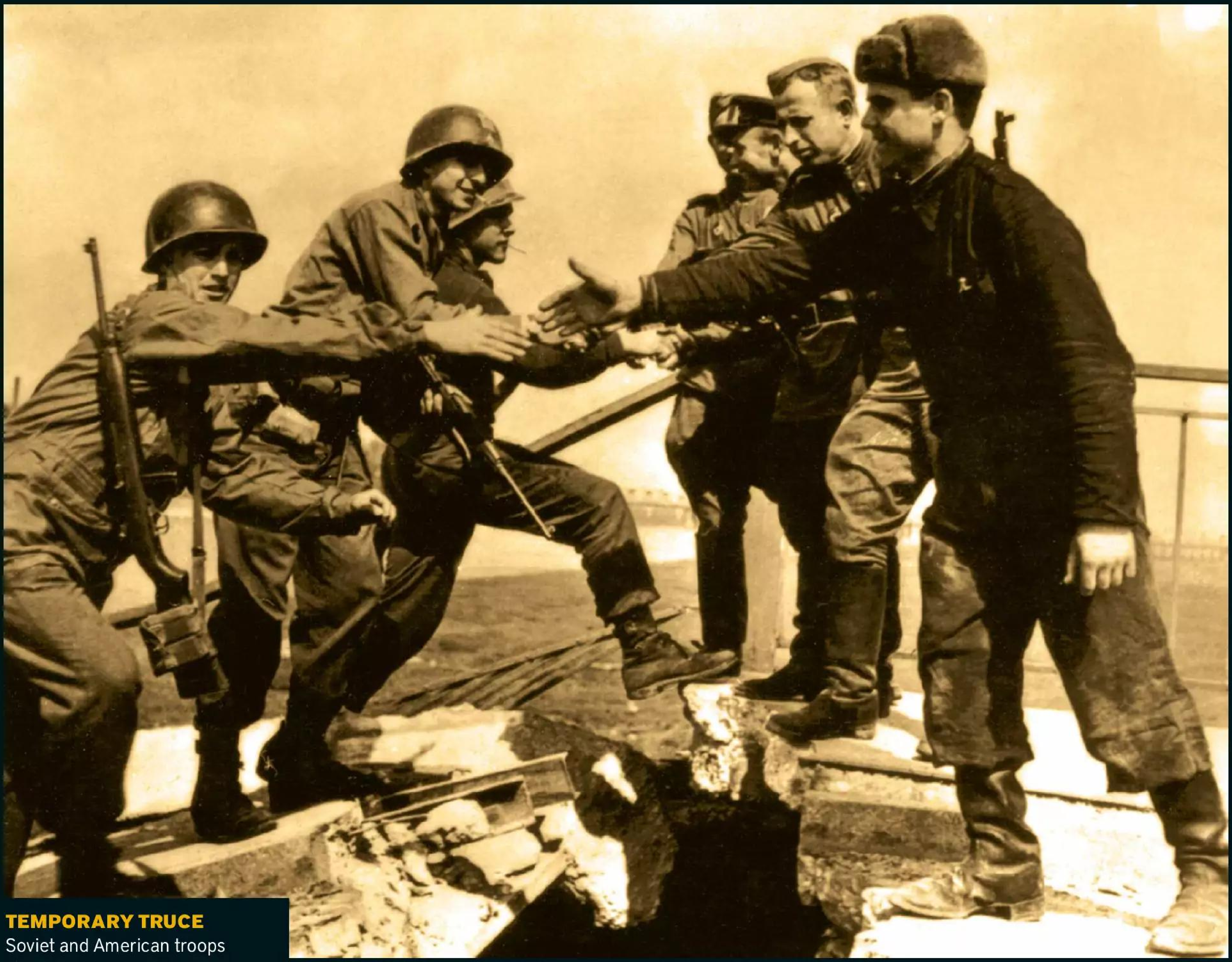
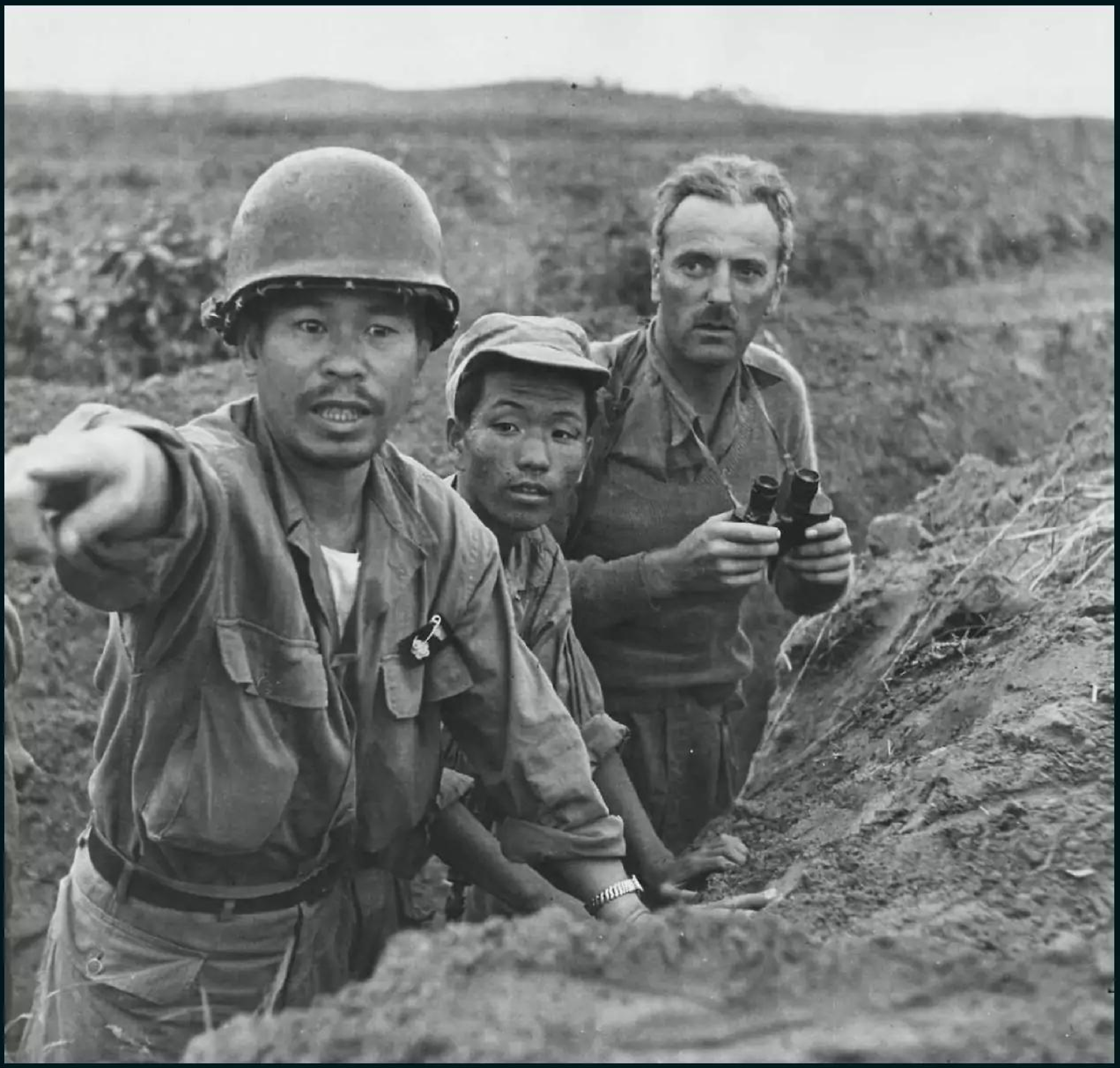


TEMPORARY TRUCE
Soviet and American troops shake hands during their historic meeting at the river Elbe in April 1945. The two nations were united by "their common hate" for Nazi Germany



A YO-YO AFFAIR
1950: British and South Korean officers discuss enemy positions on the Nakdong river during the Korean War. This was the conflict in which the Cold War turned hot

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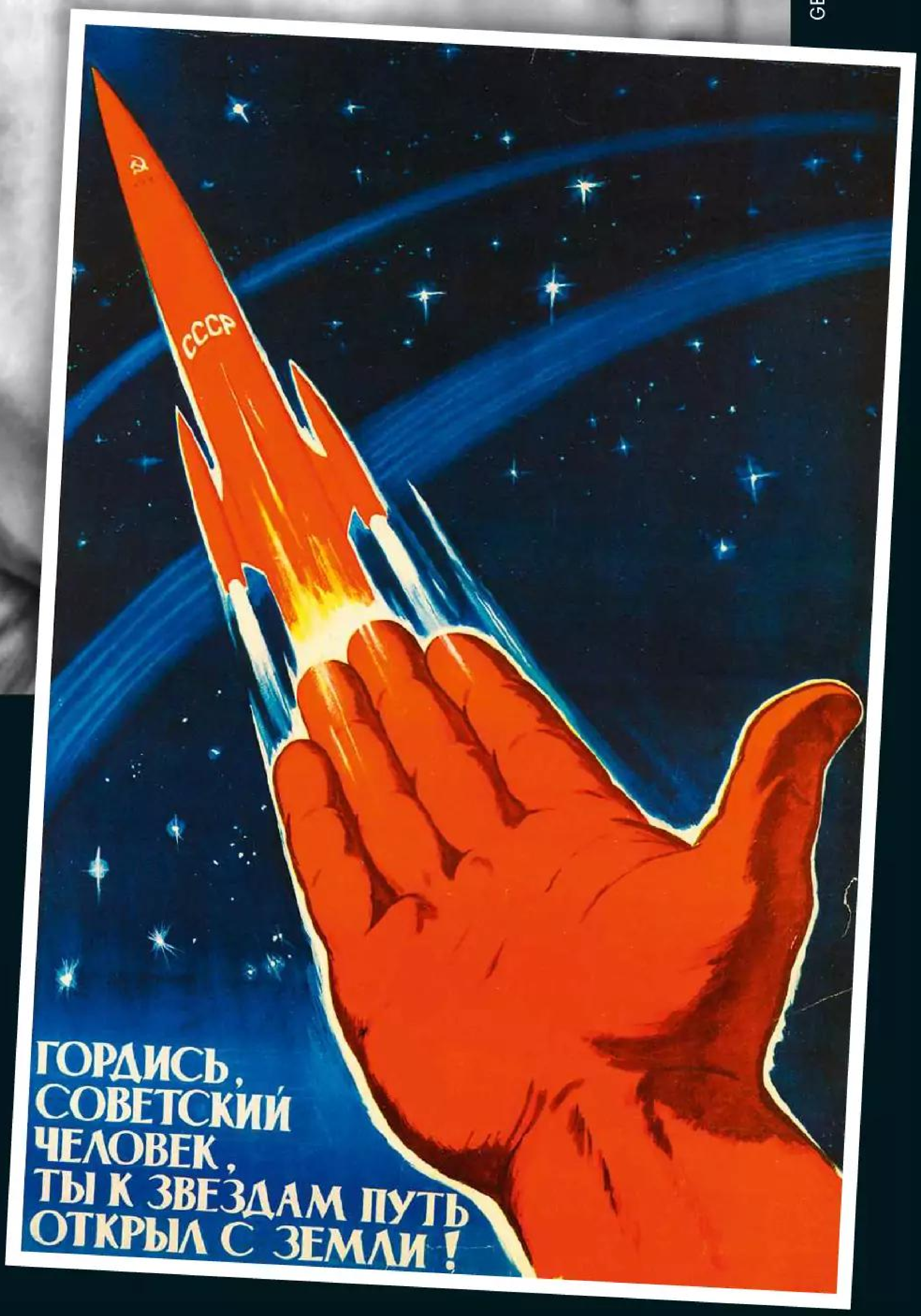
REGIME TOPPLE
April 1961: Fidel Castro pictured after the CIA-sponsored attempt to overthrow him at the Bay of Pigs. Soon the two superpowers would be "eyeball to eyeball"


СССР
ГОРДИСЬ,
СОВЕТСКИЙ
ЧЕЛОВЕК,
ТЫ К ЗВЕЗДАМ ПУТЬ
ОТКРЫЛ С ЗЕМЛИ!

THE RACE FOR SPACE
1963: A poster lauds the USSR's triumphs in the space race. These included launching a man-made satellite before the Americans

Korea was where the Cold War turned hot: the Americans lost 33,000; the Chinese perhaps half a million, including one of Mao's sons; and the overall Korean death toll was maybe 2.5 million, a 10th of the population.

During the 1950s, other power vacuums opened up as decolonisation accelerated. Although the Japanese surrender in 1945 allowed the Europeans to recover most of their Asian domains, the days of empire were now numbered. The British conceded independence to India and Burma two years later, the Dutch gave up the East Indies (Indonesia) and France failed in its 1946–54 struggle to retain Indochina. Unwilling to see the whole region go communist, successive US presidents got sucked into a 'quagmire' war in Vietnam that eventually proved to be America's greatest humiliation of the whole Cold War.

Hitherto the champion of liberty against the imperial powers, by the 1950s the US had to decide whether colonialism or communism was more distasteful and dangerous. Fearful of the growing reach of the left, Washington concluded that it was better to prop up colonial regimes and new post-colonial clients, resulting in US interventions in places like Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954.

Atomic escalation

It was also during the 1950s that the nuclear arms race – the third hallmark of the early Cold War – became truly existential, with action and reaction its perpetual dynamic. In 1945, the explosion of two American atomic bombs on Japan had helped end the Asian war, but Stalin immediately made an A-bomb his top priority; in August 1949 the USSR successfully tested its first atomic device. Their atomic monopoly at an end, the Americans went all-out for a hydrogen bomb in 1952 – and the Soviets matched them in 1953.

The race then was to upgrade their 'delivery systems' from the era of air power into the missile age. This time the Soviets beat the Americans. Their launch of a man-made satellite, Sputnik, in November 1957 was both a technological humiliation for the USA and also a sign that the USSR had a sufficiently powerful rocket to launch a nuclear missile all the way to America. Eisenhower's administration hastily accelerated its own missile programme and implemented a major scheme of civil defence.

Ideology, geopolitics and the bomb all fused together in the crisis over Cuba. Fidel Castro had seized power on the island in 1959, toppling a corrupt regime that was an American economic colony in all but name. Although Castro was not initially a Marxist, Washington's reaction to his reforms drove him into the arms of Moscow. John F Kennedy inherited a half-baked CIA plan to topple Castro, using Cuban exiles in the US to avoid implicating the White House. But the 'Bay of Pigs' operation in April 1961 proved a fiasco – leaving the president's macho brother Bobby fuming that JFK would now be "regarded as a paper tiger by the Russians".

The competition deepened when Nikita Khrushchev, the feisty Soviet leader, got the better of Kennedy at a bruising summit in Vienna in June 1961. Pumped up by success, he introduced medium-range nuclear missiles into Cuba, just 90 miles off Florida's coast.

Unlike Stalin over Berlin in 1948, Kennedy was in a position to enforce a blockade of Cuba – controlling the surrounding air space and waters and, above all, enjoying huge superiority in nuclear arsenals if it came to all-out war. So Khrushchev decided to pull his missiles out of Cuba. But it had been a close-run thing. As secretary of state Dean Rusk put it, the two superpowers had been "eyeball to eyeball" and in the end it was the Soviets who "blinked".

Kennedy admitted that "freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect". But, he added, "we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in"

On 26 June 1963, Kennedy, now secure in his presidency, spoke in West Berlin. Two summers before, the Soviets and their East German allies had erected a wall to stop the flood of east Germans, mostly young, fit and educated, going west in search of freedom and prosperity. The wall ended the brain drain, but it proved a propaganda own-goal.

Standing before a cheering crowd outside West Berlin's city hall, Kennedy admitted that "freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect". But, he added, "we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in". To those who claimed not to understand what was at stake "between the free world and the communist world" the president issued this simple challenge: "Let them come to Berlin."

As we now know, the Cold War still had a quarter-century to run, with many twists and turns. But that summer's day in Berlin would define the rest of the struggle. ●

President John F Kennedy oversaw the fiasco that was the 'Bay of Pigs' operation, in April 1961, emboldening Russia to move missiles into Cuba

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Winston Churchill

ATOMIC WARRIOR, NUCLEAR PEACEMAKER

At the dawn of the Cold War, Churchill was one of the west's leading champions of the atomic bomb. But, as Britain found itself in the crosshairs of a Soviet attack, his attitude changed, which set him at odds with the United States

BY **KEVIN RUANE**

ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

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In 2013, a short royal family home-movie came to light. Dating from early October 1952, it shows Queen Elizabeth II, eight months into her reign, enjoying a family fishing expedition at Balmoral. Also prominent is the unmistakable figure of Winston Churchill, returned as prime minister a year earlier and now, a month shy of his 78th birthday, the Queen's honoured guest.

Churchill sits at the water's edge, chatting amiably to a young Prince Charles. He is relaxed but he is not off-duty. His thoughts, we now know, regularly drifted from autumnal Scotland to a barren, windswept outpost of the Commonwealth called the Montebello Islands. There, 80 miles off the coast of north-west Australia, Britain's first atomic bomb was about to be tested.

For Churchill, a great deal rested on the success of Operation Hurricane, as the test was codenamed, not least Britain's admission to the exclusive A-bomb 'club' alongside the US and the Soviet Union. "Pop or flop?" Churchill asked his scientific advisors in the build-up to the test. "Pop!" came the reassuring reply.

On 3 October 1952, the Hurricane device exploded with a violence greater than either of the A-bombs used against Japan in 1945. We have no record of what Churchill said to the Queen later that day. How did a former cavalry officer of the late Victorian era explain that now, at the dawn of the second Elizabethan Age, he had in his hands not a sword but a weapon containing the pulsing energy that fuels the stars? Did he dwell on the fate of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Two bombs, two flashes, and 100,000 dead in an instant. If he also thought to himself "At last!", that would be understandable. Churchill had waited a long time for this moment.

Nuclear ambitions

In August 1941, with Britain in the throes of a global war, Churchill gave the go-ahead for a top-secret effort to build a super-weapon – an atomic bomb. A passion for new military technology, a love of science fiction (Hand, above all, the dread thought of an A-bomb in Hitler's hands should Nazi scientists win the battle of the laboratories, ensured his backing for Tube Alloys, as the project was christened. Following the US's entry into the war, Tube Alloys became subsumed into the much larger Manhattan Project, the American bomb programme. However, in a series of agreements with President Franklin D Roosevelt, Churchill defended Britain's rights as an atomic partner of the US and established the principle of mutual consent by those two partners before the use of any weapon.

By mid-1945 an A-bomb was combat-ready, and Harry Truman, who had become president following Roosevelt's death in the spring, duly sought Churchill's consent to employ the bomb against Japan. The war in Europe was over but the war in Asia was expected to grind on for another 18 months. Mindful of the great loss of Allied life that was bound to result from an invasion of Japan, Churchill gave his consent willingly. In August, in the wake of the obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered unconditionally. To Churchill, it was clearly a case of cause and effect.

If Churchill's role in the Second World War's atomic end-game is seldom acknowledged, the 'nuclear Churchill' of the Cold War is even less well known. Yet, in the decade after 1945, the A-bomb – "the perfected means of human destruction", as Churchill described it – and "its monstrous child, the hydrogen bomb", played a critical part in shaping his Cold War outlook.

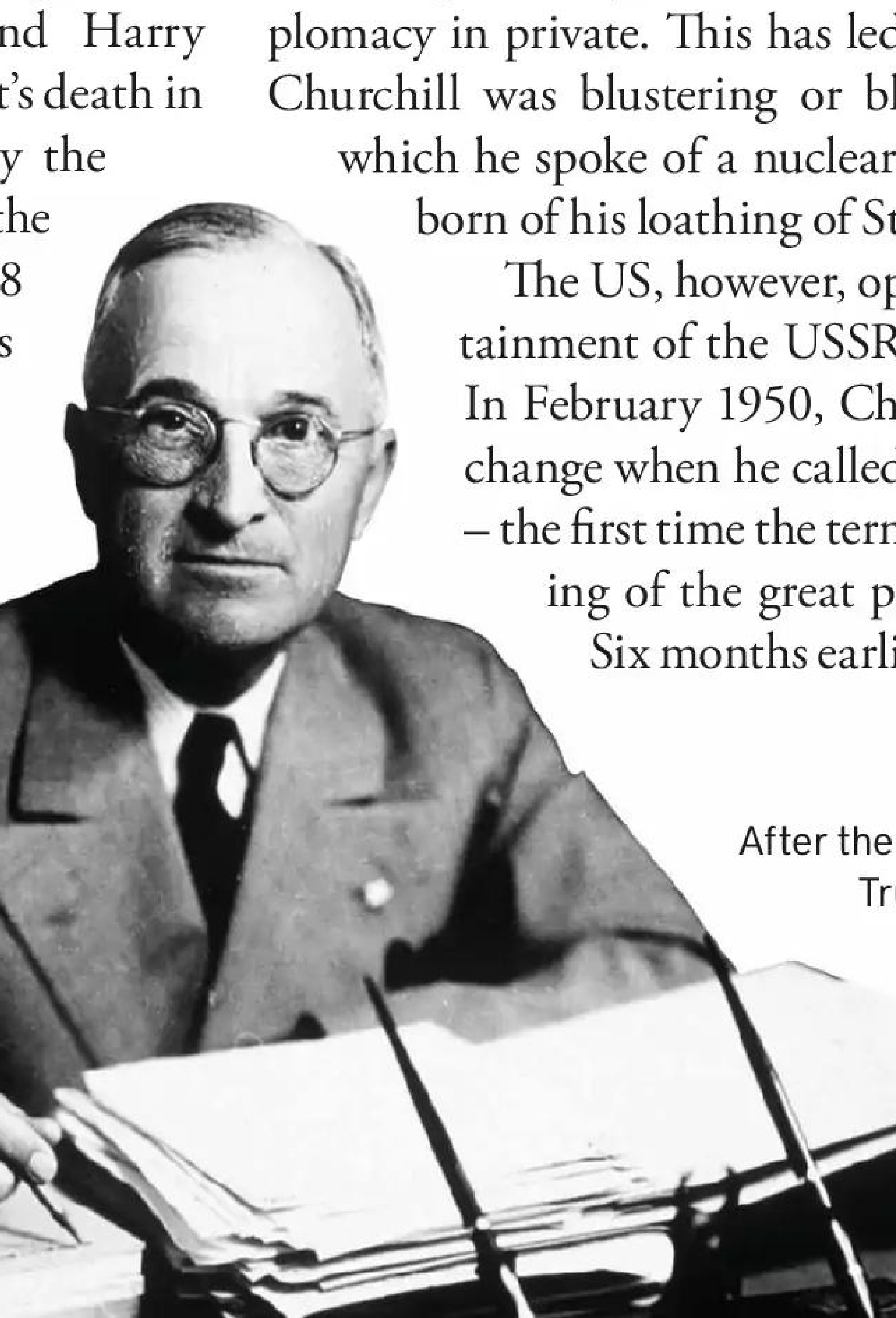
In the decade after 1945, the A-bomb and **"its monstrous child, the hydrogen bomb"** played a critical part in shaping Churchill's Cold War outlook

Soon after losing office in July 1945, Churchill began sounding the alarm over the next great threat to freedom in Europe. With the Red Army occupying eastern Europe, and with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin refusing to honour previous pledges to permit democratic elections in the area, Churchill called on the US – most famously in his March 1946 'Iron Curtain' speech – to take the lead in organising the free world's resistance to Soviet communism.

When, in 1947, Truman answered the call, the Cold War really began to bite. But Churchill also entertained 'hot war' thoughts. He was keen for the US to exploit its atomic monopoly by issuing an ultimatum to Stalin to accept peace in Europe on western terms – or face the nuclear consequences. As Churchill put it to the US ambassador in London in 1948, the time had come to tell the Soviets that if they did not 'retire' from East Germany and eastern Europe, "we will raze their cities".

Churchill knew that his views would be poorly received by a British public still hopeful that differences with the USSR could be resolved peaceably, and he mostly pressed the merits of atomic diplomacy in private. This has led some historians to conclude that Churchill was blustering or bluffing. But the vehemence with which he spoke of a nuclear showdown suggests a seriousness born of his loathing of Stalinist totalitarianism.

The US, however, opted for the patient, long-term containment of the USSR in preference to atomic menaces. In February 1950, Churchill's own outlook appeared to change when he called publicly for a Cold War 'summit' – the first time the term had been used to describe a meeting of the great powers. What prompted this shift? Six months earlier, the USSR successfully tested an



After the USSR built an atomic device, Harry Truman advanced plans to develop a hydrogen bomb, pushing Churchill to call for a Cold War 'summit'

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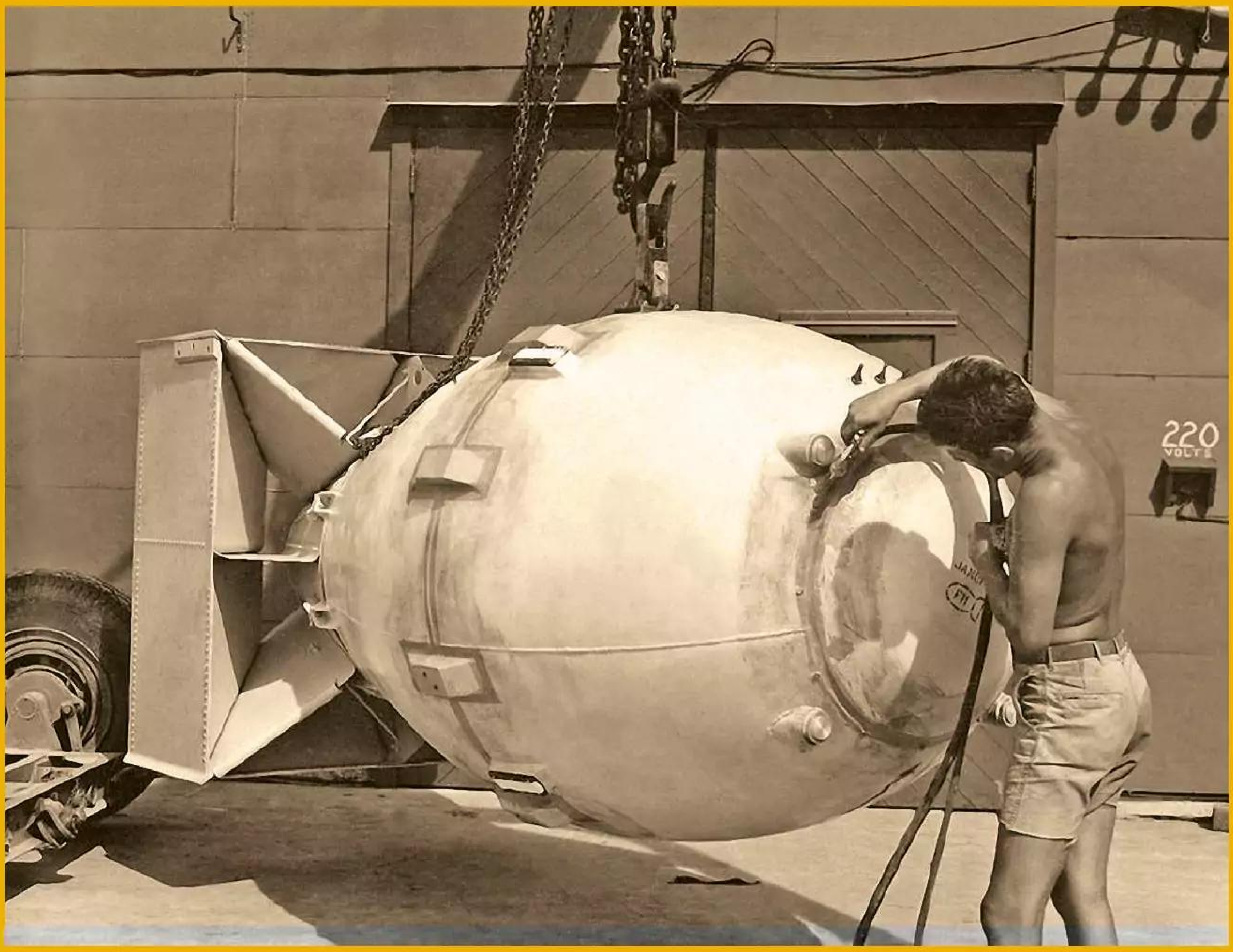
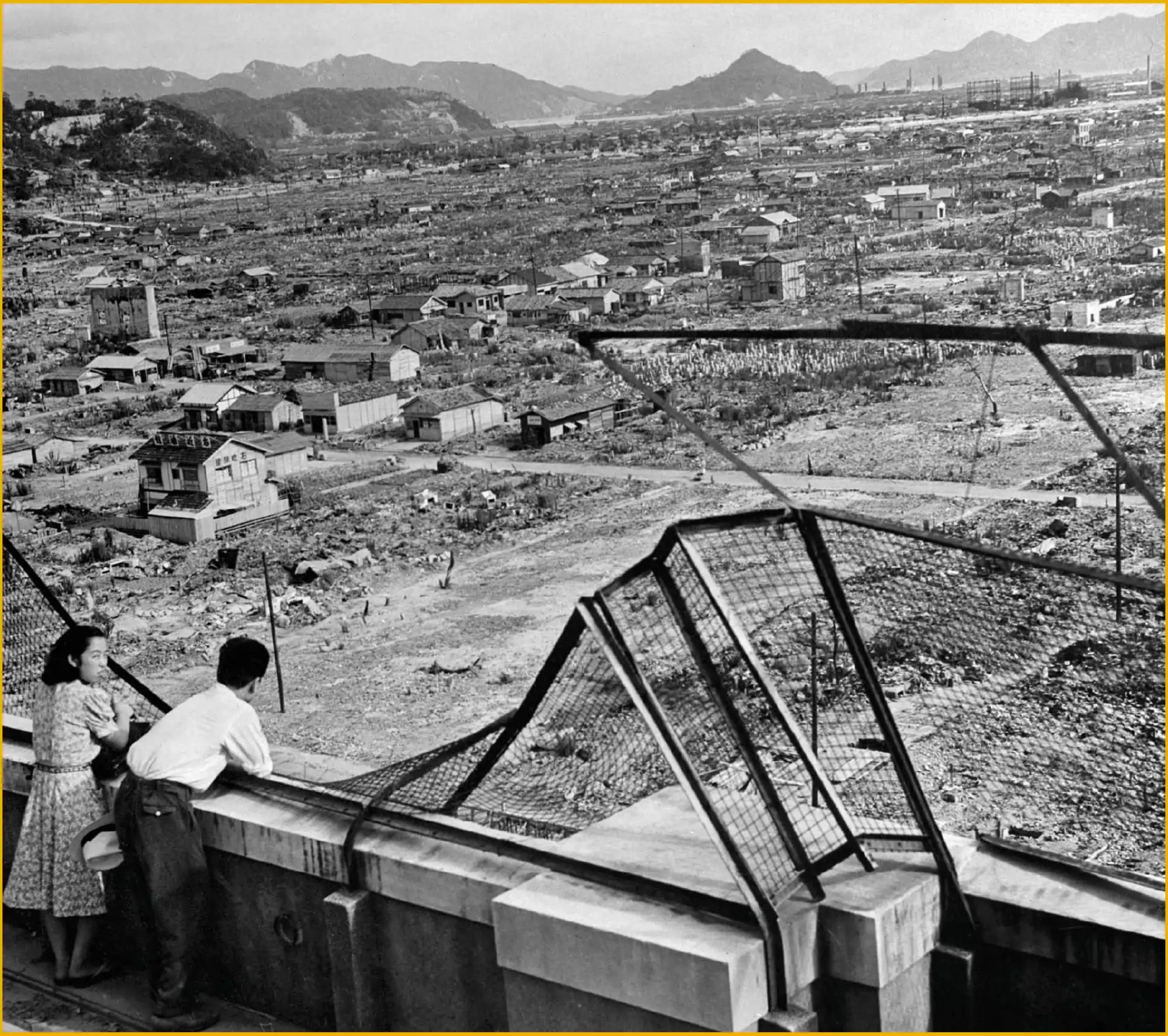


MANHATTAN PROJECT
The A-bomb, also known as Fat Man, which was detonated over Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. It was the largest of the only two nuclear weapons ever used in warfare

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER
A photo of Hiroshima taken in 1948, three years after the US dropped an atomic bomb on the city. The attack, as well as the one on Nagasaki, killed a combined total of 100,000 in an instant and effectively ended the Second World War



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THERMONUCLEAR DAWN
A 10.4-megaton device, codenamed Ivy Mike, is detonated by the US on 1 November 1952 at Enewetak Atoll in the South Pacific. It was the world's first thermonuclear test and made Britain's own recently acquired nuclear bomb seem puny by comparison

atomic device. In a flash, the American nuclear monopoly disappeared. A disturbed Truman administration responded by advancing plans to develop a hydrogen bomb – a thermonuclear weapon with a destructive potential up to one thousand times greater than the A-bombs used against Japan. This was the troubled backdrop against which Churchill issued his call for a summit.

At the time, Labour accused him of insincerity and of preying on popular nuclear nervousness merely to win votes – and unsuccessfully so, since Churchill lost the February 1950 general election. The Labour charge does seem to have merit. Over the following 18 months, Churchill repeatedly argued that the Americans should use their atomic superiority (if no longer monopoly) to try to shape a European peace on western terms. The summit Churchill envisioned would not involve negotiations in the true sense of the word: there would be no give and take, only atomic-infused dictation.

Britain in the bull's-eye

In October 1951, when Churchill finally returned as prime minister, nuclear issues were becoming pressing. Under Labour, the US had been granted bases for its atomic-capable B-29 bombers in East Anglia. This, Churchill recognised, put the UK in the bull's-eye of Soviet nuclear retaliation if the Cold War ever escalated into World War Three.

At the same time, Churchill applauded the efforts of his predecessor, Clement Attlee, in pursuing a British A-bomb. The prospect of a postwar Anglo-American nuclear partnership had been thwarted when the US congress passed the 1946 McMahon Act prohibiting nuclear collaboration with other countries. This meant that the Attlee government was forced to build a bomb from its own limited resources. In October 1952, the success of the Labour-inspired Operation Hurricane left the Tory Churchill as the first prime minister in British history to have at his disposal a nuclear weapon.

This triumph was soon overshadowed by the news that the United States had tested an enormous (10.4-megaton) device in the Pacific. In comparison, the British bomb was puny – a mere 25 kilotons. However, because the US authorities refused to confirm that their test involved a hydrogen bomb, it was the USSR that was able to claim in August 1953 that it had become the world's first thermonuclear power. The Soviet H-bomb jolted Churchill. "We were now as far from the age of the atomic bomb as the atomic bomb itself from the bow and arrow," he reflected.

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> “Even if some of us temporarily **survive in some deep cellar,” Churchill reflected,** “there will be nothing left to do but to take a pill to end it all”

By 1954, the spectre of the H-bomb had wrought a profound – and this time genuine – change in Churchill’s Cold War outlook. That February, President Dwight D Eisenhower confirmed that the US possessed deliverable hydrogen bombs. Then, the following month, when the US tested a monstrous 15-megaton H-bomb in the Pacific, Churchill learned a new word: fallout.

Codenamed Bravo, the US test generated clouds of radioactive debris that drifted many miles from ground zero, showering a Japanese tuna trawler with toxic ash. Around the world, panic spread that the H-bomb was out of control. An ill-judged statement by the chairman of the US Atomic Energy Commission, claiming that a single H-bomb could destroy New York City, pushed anxiety levels higher still.

Churchill was more disturbed than most. According to a top-secret report from his nuclear experts, 10 hydrogen bombs dropped on 10 major UK cities would kill one-third of the country’s population instantly, and expose a further third to the fatal effects of fallout. No wonder he confessed to being “more worried by the hydrogen bomb than by all the rest of my worries put together”. The apocalyptic implications of the “horror bomb”, as the British press dubbed it, went on to reinvigorate Churchill’s quest for a summit. It also invested that quest with real sincerity. Never again did he speak of dictating to Moscow. Instead, with Stalin dead and his successors in the Kremlin talking of peaceful co-existence, Churchill dedicated the final year of his premiership to bringing about east–west reconciliation.

But while he was working for peace, Churchill took no risks with national security. He viewed the H-bomb as the ultimate deterrent and, in July 1954, he persuaded his cabinet that Britain must have its own weapon. Three years later, the UK would graduate as the world’s third thermonuclear power.

The threat of America

For most historians, Churchill’s H-bomb decision reflected his preoccupation with national prestige – the bomb was a status symbol – and, more especially, his determination to keep his country safe from danger. But what kind of danger? Ironically, by 1954 Churchill was almost as worried by the nuclear policies of the US, Britain’s ally, as he was by the threat from the Soviet enemy.

In February, Eisenhower wrote Churchill an emotionally charged letter about the need to “throw back the Russian threat” and “sharpen up [one’s] sword for the struggle that cannot possibly be escaped”. To Churchill, the US seemed to be contemplating what he called a “forestalling” war on the USSR before the latter could develop intercontinental bombers or rockets – and this made him deeply uneasy.

In 1954, the US was beyond the range of Soviet bombers. Not so the UK – it would be devastated by any H-bomb assault. “Even if some of us temporarily survive in some deep cellar under mounds of flaming and contaminated rubble,” Churchill reflected, “there will be nothing left to do but to take a pill to end it all.” The Soviets, he suspected, being far behind the US in nuclear mega-tonnage, would behave cautiously. And if the UK were to stand a chance of restraining the US, he felt, it needed to be respected as an ally. “Influence,” Churchill maintained, “depended on possession of force,” especially thermonuclear force.

To Churchill’s regret, a summit never materialised before he retired as prime minister in April 1955. By then, however, he had concluded that nuclear arms, especially the genocidal H-bomb, were a potentially stabilising element in world affairs, and this took some of the edge off his disappointment.

The “annihilating character of these agencies may bring an utterly unforeseeable security to mankind”, he predicted. If the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers could be balanced, then by a “sublime irony… safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation”. A good decade before the phrase Mutually Assured Destruction entered the Cold War vocabulary, Churchill was displaying distinct signs of MAD-ness.

Churchill’s approach to nuclear weapons evolved over 15 years of war and then Cold War. In the process, he proved to be a shape-shifter. Does it diminish Churchill the thermonuclear peacemaker of the 1950s that he had once been a would-be atomic warrior? Hardly. It confirms instead his remarkable capacity to adapt and learn, and shows that even in old age he was capable of visionary thinking on the great life-and-death issue of the postwar age. ●

Churchill, flanked by Anthony Eden, on his return from a conference with US president Dwight D Eisenhower in 1954. By this point in the Cold War, with Britain in range of Soviet bombs, Churchill was growing increasingly alarmed by American sabre-rattling

GETTY IMAGES

Discover the complex and vast reach of the Cold War, from the theatres of war in Korea and Vietnam to the Cuban missile crisis and the 1983 Able Archer incident

CONFRONTATION

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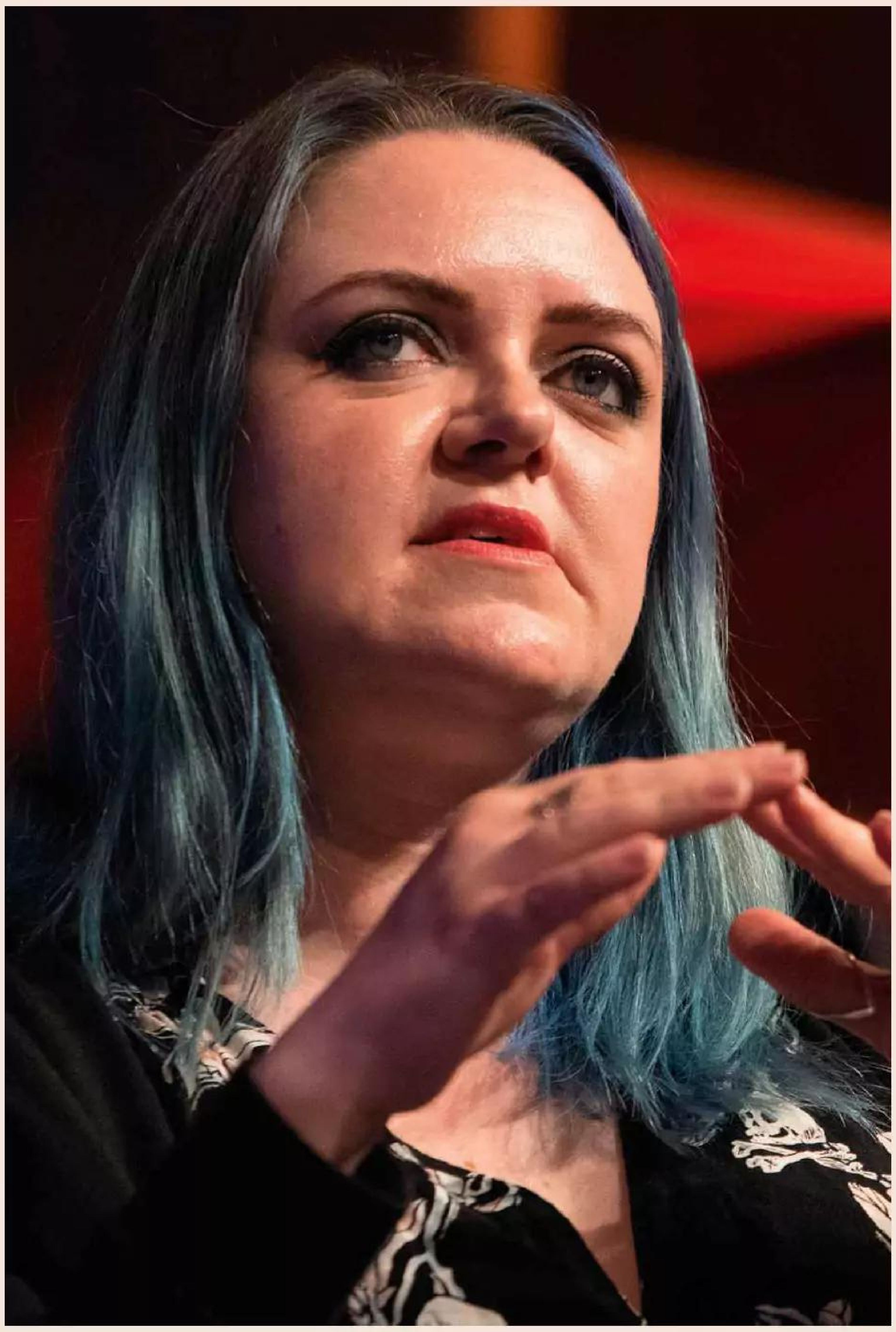
& CRISIS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Author Alex von Tunzelmann speaking at Hay Festival 2022; The clean-up gets underway after Bloody Thursday – 25 October 1956 – in Budapest, Hungary; Israeli soldiers with a souvenir portrait of Nasser during the Suez crisis; Anglo-French troops prepare to land at Port Fuad, Egypt, on 5 November 1956

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

"The Suez crisis made Britain look incompetent and petty – a spent force"

In 2016, **ALEX VON TUNZELMANN** spoke to Matt Elton about her book on the twin crises of the autumn of 1956 – the Suez crisis and the Hungarian uprising – and how they pushed the world to the brink

Matt Elton Why do you think that this story has been under-served in previous books?

Alex von Tunzelmann My book looks at the Suez crisis simultaneously with the Hungarian uprising against the Soviet Union. What I found when I started researching is that a lot of people don't appreciate that both of these massive international events happened within the same fortnight in the autumn of 1956, and interacted with each other in a significant way. Together, they pushed the world as close as it got to nuclear war in the period between 1945 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

There were so many different things happening geopolitically at once, and it was a coincidence that these events happened at the same time – but the fact that they did became extremely fateful. The Suez crisis was the tipping point between the period of imperial European rule, in which France and Britain had a major say in the world, and the rising world order of the US and the Soviet Union having a lot more sway. It represented a move towards superpowers, rather than empires, running the show.

Were any factors or events key in setting the crises in motion?

For every nation involved it was about something different and quite existential – and the crises really brought in a lot of the world. There really aren't rational explanations for a lot of what happened in the Suez crisis and the Hungarian rebellion, and a lot of that comes down to national emotion. For the French, it was about a rebellion against their rule in Algeria: they were convinced, wrongly, that the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, was behind it and that getting rid of him would calm everything down.

Britain wanted to overthrow Nasser and have control of the Suez canal because it was the main conduit for its global trade, particularly oil. This was all about oil on some level, because that's the way in which conflicts now run.

These two nations considered all sorts of things to get rid of Nasser, including assassination. The scary thing, looking at this through modern eyes, is that you are reminded of the 21st-century situation in Iraq. They had no real plan for what would happen if they did assassinate Nasser, what sort of government they'd bring in as a replacement – no kind of exit strategy at all.

How did the Tripartite Aggression unfold, and how far was it expected?

It wasn't really expected. The Tripartite Aggression – Britain, France and Israel – was a secret plan they cooked up together. It was so crazy that afterwards many people in the British establishment refused to believe it had happened, and denied it for a long time.

The idea was that Israel would invade Egypt on the pretence that they were going to root out infiltrators, because there was already tension in the region. They would stage a raid into Egypt towards the Suez Canal which Britain and France would condemn, telling both sides that they had to stop fighting or they would invade. Britain and France would make Israel and Egypt both retreat a set distance →

Anthony Eden prepares to make a broadcast about the situation in Suez on 3 November 1956. The fiasco would ultimately cost Britain its status as a superpower

> “When we’re looking at our own history, we need to be honest that this was not our finest hour”

from the Suez Canal, and then ever-so-selflessly occupy the canal for the security of the world.

Because they had planned it in advance they knew that Israel would abide by their terms but Egypt would not, and the idea was that they would then be able to fight all the way to Cairo and overthrow Nasser.

It was a thinly disguised bluff, and how they thought they could get away with it is anyone’s guess. Everyone quickly spotted that Britain and France had been colluding with Israel, and the Soviet Union was convinced that the US was also involved.

Turning to events in Hungary, what happened on 25 October?

‘Bloody Thursday’ – 25 October 1956 – is a very significant day for Hungary. It’s still very hard to know precise details of what happened, and there are still very many contradictory reports, but effectively thousands of people were gathered in a large and peaceful protest in the main square in Budapest when somebody started shooting.

It’s still impossible to know who, but we do know that a large number of people were killed. It was deeply shocking, brutal bloodshed, that really galvanised people. There were pitched battles in the streets, fought by often incredibly young rebels. They were desperate, and those who survived were terribly punished afterwards.

To what extent did the situation in Hungary push an already volatile situation closer to the brink?

It clearly did, and you can see that the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was thinking very hard about Suez when he was dealing with Hungary.

Both of these crises were referred to the UN, which was awkward because normally Britain would have stood by the US and condemned Soviet aggression – but since it was doing exactly the same thing, the UN was hamstrung. The US went against Britain and France at the UN for the first time, so this was a real danger to that alliance.

How difficult was the position in which the US found itself?

It was extraordinarily difficult: they were trapped between a lot of different competing alliances. Britain and France had lied to them, and were continuing to lie, when it was perfectly obvious what was going on.

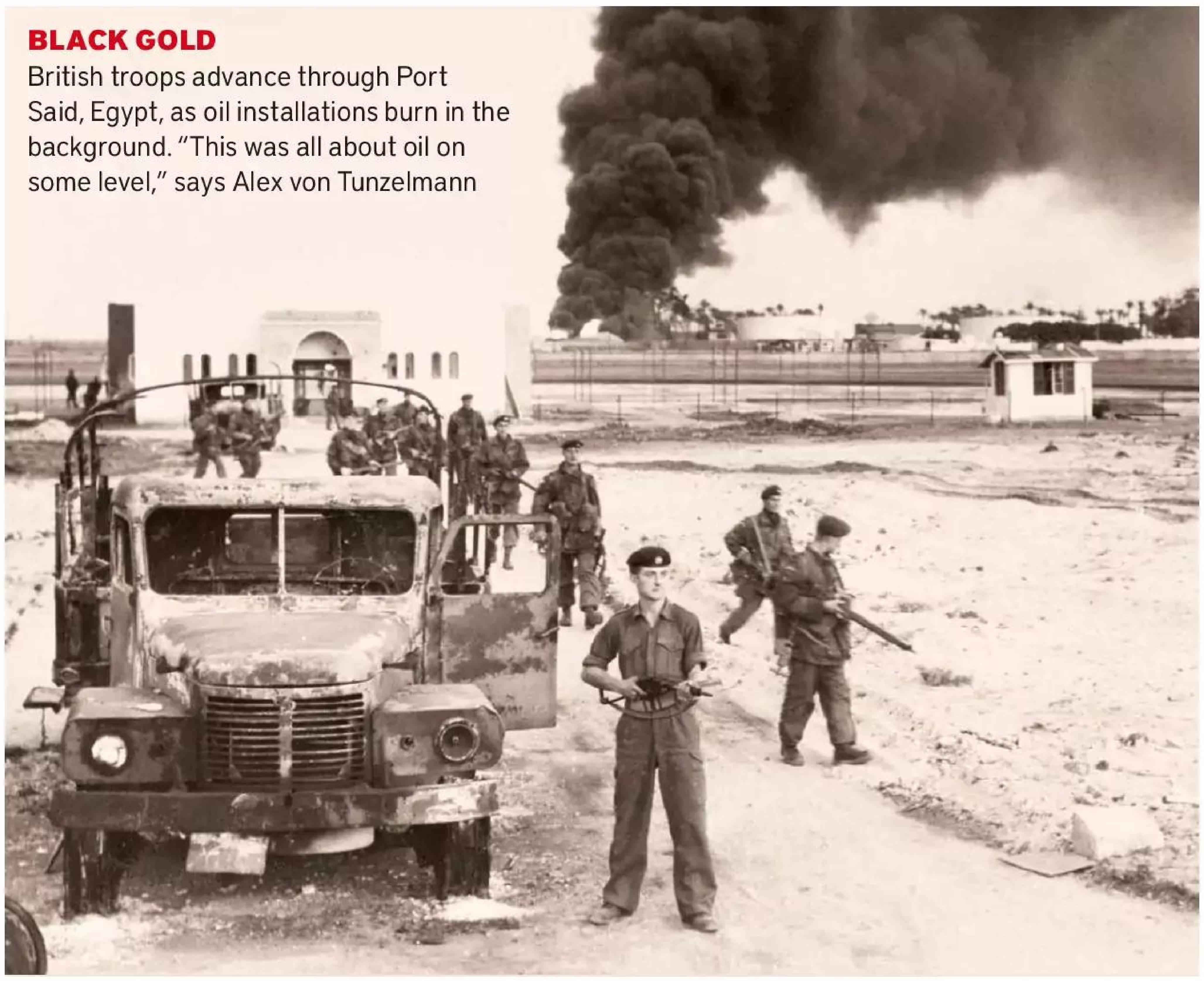
It was also complicated because, although the US and Israel didn’t have quite as solid a relationship as they do now, it was still a pretty solid relationship.

It had therefore been widely expected in Britain, France and Israel that the US would not go against Israel in public, but in fact they did – extremely strongly. This was all happening in the week leading up to Dwight D Eisenhower’s second presidential election, too, and it was assumed that he wouldn’t stamp down on Israel because he would lose the election if he lost Jewish votes in the US. But actually Eisenhower was very clear that he didn’t mind about losing the election, he just wanted to do the right thing.

Why was the Tripartite Aggression so badly bungled?

When you look through the military plans, they’re extremely poor and full of gaps – but actually the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that, repeatedly. They were really opposed to this whole operation, and advised the British prime minister, Anthony Eden, that the consequences would be terrible. All the advice was not to do it, but Eden ignored it.

It was really a disaster. The British and French got about a third of the way



BLACK GOLD
British troops advance through Port Said, Egypt, as oil installations burn in the background. “This was all about oil on some level,” says Alex von Tunzelmann

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SECRET PLAN
French paratroopers leave Egypt as the Suez crisis deepens, 1956. "Britain and France had lied to the United States, and were continuing to lie, even when it was perfectly obvious what was going on," says Alex von Tunzelmann

BRIGEMAN IMAGES

down the canal before they had to stop, because the weight of world opinion was such that they simply had to. Israel achieved its objectives initially but soon lost Sinai again.

Things weren't much better in Hungary, meanwhile, where the rebellion had been completely crushed. The Soviet Union, tragically, rolled back its small, nascent reforms and life became much more unpleasant for many people living in the Soviet bloc.

And neither Britain nor France achieved their objectives. All that the crises achieved was to massively strengthen Nasser and, separately, Soviet control of its satellite states.

Is it fair to say that this was the last point at which Britain was a major player on the world stage?

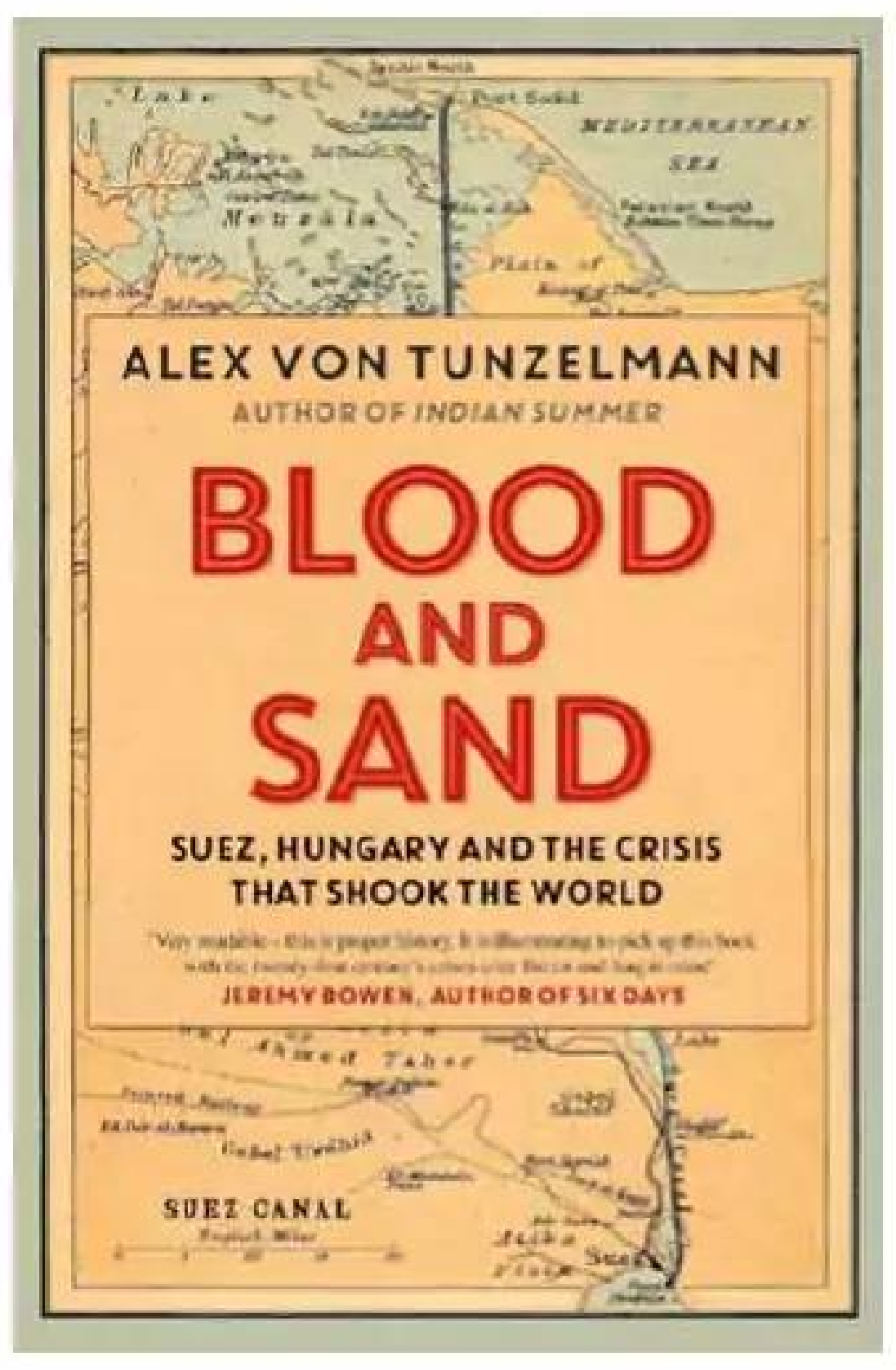
That's a difficult question, because Britain has undoubtedly still played a role. But what is astonishing about this situation is that, when people talked about superpowers in the 1950s, they talked about three: Britain, the US and the Soviet Union. After Suez, they only talked about two.

It was so humiliating for Britain – a bad, immoral plan that they didn't even achieve successfully – that it made the nation look incompetent, petty and a spent force. It reduced its influence globally quite substantially. Eventually some of that came back, but it showed that Britain was no longer a superpower and that, ultimately, it had to bow down and do what the US told it to.

Are there any misconceptions about this period that you would like this book to help correct?

The one that I still encounter most commonly in Britain is an amazingly strong sense that the US stitched us up. That's really not justified by events at all. Britain and France wanted to invade Egypt, and Eisenhower said straight away to Eden that he should not even contemplate it – and he kept saying it consistently all the way through, in private and public. Yet somehow the British managed to convince themselves that the US would back them up anyway.

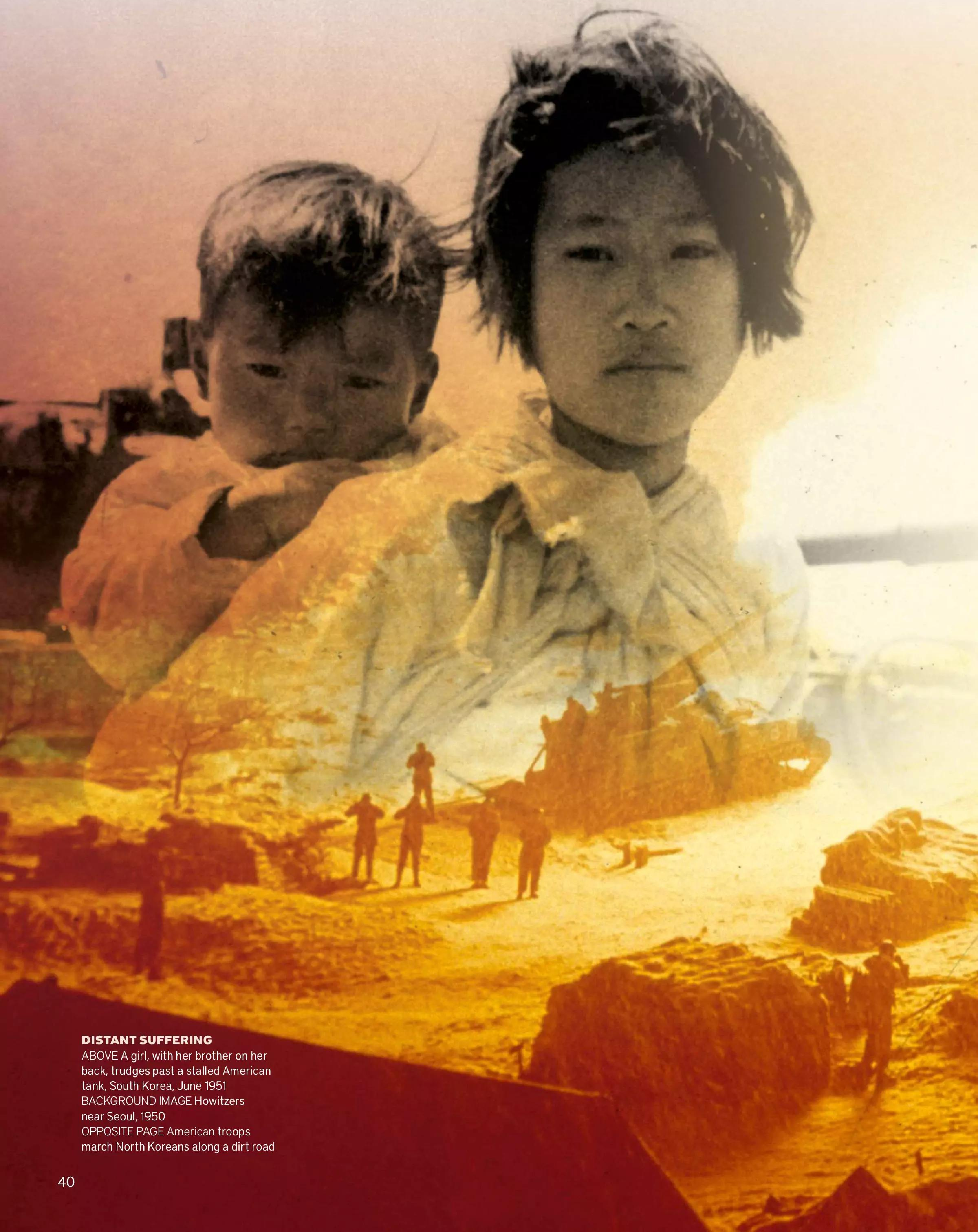
So, actually, the Americans were completely straight most of the time and did exactly what they said they'd do – the problem was that the British plan was terrible. I do think that when we're looking at our own history we need to be honest that this was not our finest hour. ●



ALEX VON TUNZELMANN
AUTHOR OF INDIAN SUMMER
BLOOD AND SAND
SUEZ, HUNGARY AND THE CRISIS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD
JEREMY BOWEN, AUTHOR OF SIX DAYS

Blood and Sand: Suez, Hungary and the Crisis That Shook the World
by Alex von Tunzelmann

Simon & Schuster, 2016, 480 pages, £9.99



DISTANT SUFFERING
ABOVE A girl, with her brother on her back, trudges past a stalled American tank, South Korea, June 1951
BACKGROUND IMAGE Howitzers near Seoul, 1950
OPPOSITE PAGE American troops march North Koreans along a dirt road

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

HOW WE FORGOT THE **KOREAN WAR**

When conflict erupted on the Korean peninsula 75 years ago, many Britons feared the worst, anticipating a return to conscription and air-raids. So why did anxiety soon turn into apathy – and why has that sentiment dominated British attitudes to the war ever since?

BY **GRACE HUXFORD**

Today, not many people know the names Hewlett Johnson or Monica Felton. But during the Korean War (1950–53), these two figures were well known, even notorious, for their opposition to British involvement in Korea. Their stories tell us an alternative history of the Korean War, of the social response to the conflict back in Britain. Even though the fighting raged many thousands of miles away, Felton and Johnson show us the complex impact it had in Britain, the legacies of which we continue to live with today.

To grasp why these two Britons opposed the Korean War so passionately, we need first to understand why the conflict erupted in the first place – and, to do that, we must return to the climax of the Second World War. When the Japanese empire collapsed in August 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to divide the Korean peninsula into two occupation zones, along a latitude line – the 38th Parallel North.

By 1948, the two areas of occupation had become separate states championing bitterly opposing ideologies: Kim Il-sung's communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north, and Syngman Rhee's western-aligned Republic of Korea in the south. Over the following two years, tensions between the two rivals increased until, on 25 June 1950, North Korean troops invaded their southern neighbour.

Britain soon became one of many nations to pledge their military support to the United Nations force – led by the charismatic American general Douglas MacArthur – tasked with defending the south. The war took on a whole new – and far more dangerous – dimension when the People's Republic of China entered the fray in October 1950 to support North Korea. In short, for Britain, the Cold War got considerably hot in 1950. And the situation would remain serious until, after three years of rapid advances, retreats and then grinding stalemate, an armistice was signed in July 1953.

At first, many Britons supported the government's decision to throw its weight behind the UN intervention. But not Hewlett Johnson and Monica Felton. Johnson was a senior Church of England clergyman, known as the 'Red' Dean of Canterbury because of his support for leftwing causes. A committed pacifist, he and others claimed that the United States was using

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aerial "germ warfare" against the enemy (though historians have questioned the scientific credentials of these claims). One report accused US air forces of dropping diseased rodents over three Chinese provinces in 1952. Johnson himself visited China and attracted considerable attention – and criticism – for siding with the communists, not least from others in the Church of England. The Kent Branch of the British Legion even discussed moving their Remembrance Day celebrations away from Canterbury, so that this "avowed communist" would not take their service during this time of war.

Dr Monica Felton was the chair of the Stevenage Development Corporation, the first female chair of one of Britain's new postwar towns, and a Labour councillor. In spring 1951, she visited North Korea as part of a sponsored "fact-finding mission" and similarly accused American and South Korean forces of widespread brutality, with Britain standing by. Felton even later claimed that she had visited Korea "for Stevenage", to protect the postwar vision "for a new and better kind of world".

Felton's vision attracted a storm of criticism. When she returned to Britain, she found she had been sacked by Hugh Dalton, the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Others clamoured for a harsher punishment. Nigel Fisher, Conservative MP for Hitchin, argued that she should be indicted for treason. He stated in parliament that if, during the Second World War, "a British subject had gone to Germany, consorted with the enemy, returned to this country and spread Nazi propaganda here, it seems to me he could have been indicted for treason…What is the difference in this case?" And in 1951, the punishment for treason was still the death penalty. Felton escaped this fate, but she never returned to public service after her fateful visit to Korea.

The uncertain peace

Felton and Johnson's opposition to the Korean War – and the backlash that their opposition provoked – shines a light onto Britain's view of its place in the world in the early 1950s. Britain at this time was adjusting uncertainly to peacetime and was concerned about what the new Cold War would bring. When it pledged its forces to the UN effort as part of an allied "police action" (as US president Harry Truman termed it), it was still recovering from the massive social and economic effects of the Second World War. Many staple items, such as tea, were still rationed, and on the outbreak of war in Korea, many British people worried that they would again have to fight. A few even considered redigging their Anderson shelters or hoarding food.

Yet for all the fear of the summer of 1950, over the following three years something strange happened: the Korean War retreated in the public consciousness, changing from a cause celebre to a bloody sideshow. When news of an armistice filtered back to Britain in July 1953, it was greeted with widespread indifference. One newspaper quipped that the public had shown more enthusiasm for the England cricket team's victory over Australia in that summer's Ashes.

That general indifference was far from short-lived: it informed attitudes to the conflict in the following decades. With the notable exception of the sitcom *Fawlty Towers* (Basil Fawlty was probably the nation's best-known Korean War veteran), few British novels, TV shows and films remembered Korea – and the war was commemorated by only a handful of national memorials.

So why did a conflict that cost more than a thousand British lives not become a bigger part of British culture? Why are Hewlett Johnson and Monica Felton now footnotes in modern British history? In short, how did we forget the Korean War? One reason perhaps lies in its location. Unlike other areas of east Asia, Britain had few historic links with the Korean peninsula. Many British soldiers could not even find Korea on a map prior to 1950.

On the outbreak of the Korean War, many British soldiers couldn't even locate Korea on a map

Despite this, some British troops had encountered their Korean counterparts just a few years earlier – recalling their harsh treatment at the hands of Korean guards in Japanese PoW camps. But not even these bitter memories could prevent Korea from seeming incredibly remote to most Britons.

Another potential reason why the Korean War failed to capture Britons' imagination was its ambiguous aims. Britain pledged first naval and then land forces to support the UN mission in Korea, eventually forming a crucial part of the 1st Commonwealth Division from 28 July 1951. In a broadcast in 1950, Labour prime minister Clement Attlee implied that it was in Britons' interests to face down aggression in the far east, just as they had done in the last war. He told the British people: "The fire that has been started in distant Korea may burn down your house."

Attlee's government is often better known for its establishment of a National Health Service in 1948. Yet this reforming administration dealt in warfare as well as welfare, becoming embroiled in violence in Kenya, Palestine, Malaya, Greece – and, of course, Korea. Such wars did not fit within Britain's postwar vision of itself, so Korea and other wars in the 1950s slipped through the net of British national memory.

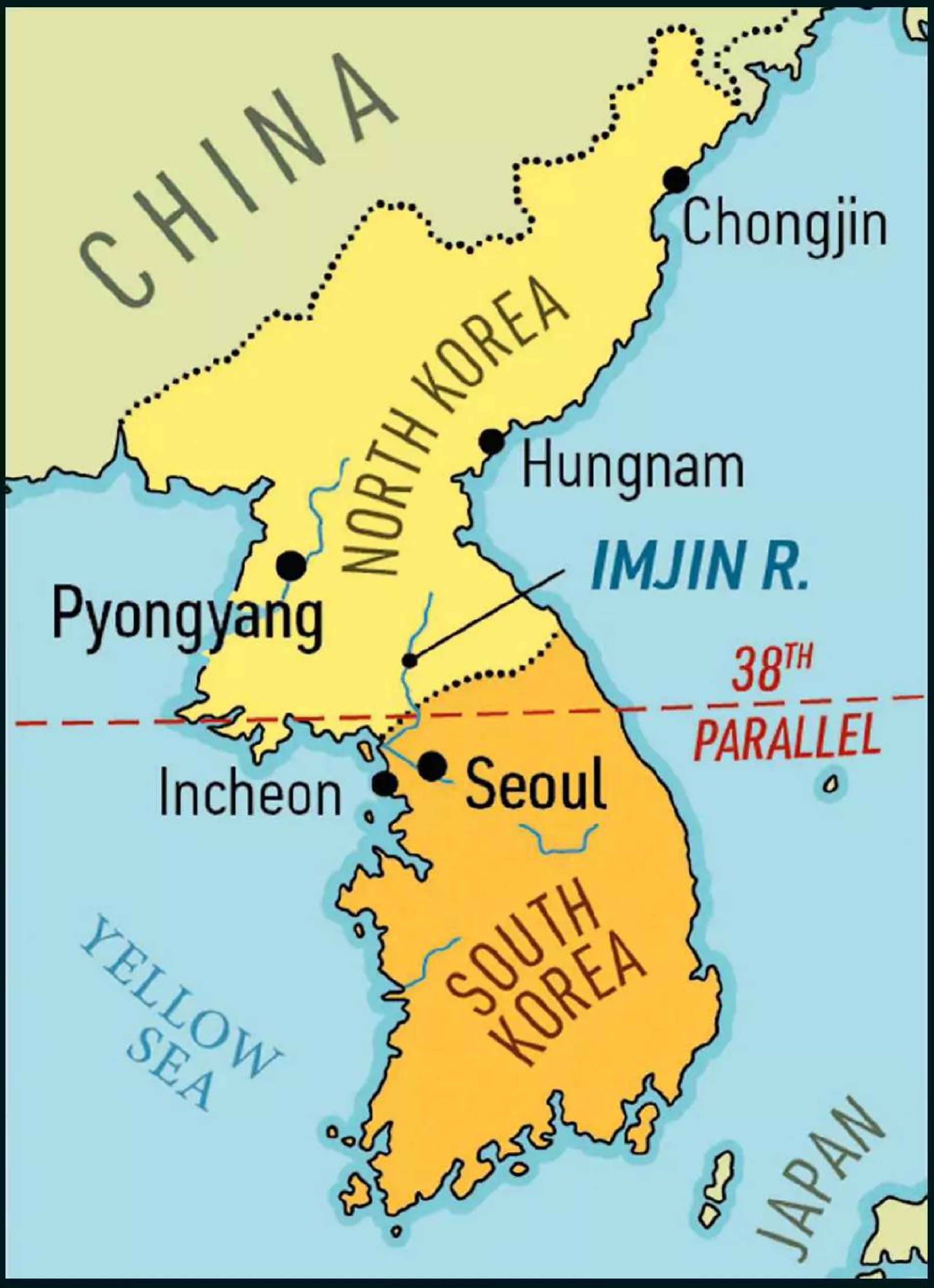
China turns the tables

But what did combating aggression and supporting the UN actually look like? In the first half of the war, it clearly involved repelling the invasion. But from autumn 1950, having turned the North Korean invasion into a retreat, UN forces pressed on beyond the 38th Parallel. When China joined the war in the autumn of 1950, it turned the tables completely, forcing the UN troops back south of the 38th Parallel. MacArthur even talked of using nuclear weapons against China, something that caused significant trepidation in Britain.

For Britain, the war looked even more troubling by April 1951, when British forces engaged in one of the most ferocious battles in its postwar history, at the Imjin river. This was the scene of the Gloucestershire Regiment's famous 'last stand' on 'Gloster Hill' (Solma-Ri). Some 527 British soldiers were captured and marched north to prisoner of war camps. Among them was their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel James Carne, who was awarded the Victoria Cross on his release in 1953 for "gallant and distinguished service in Korea". A naturally quiet man, Carne withstood months of solitary confinement as a PoW; a stone cross he carved is still on display in Gloucester Cathedral, testament to his bravery.

for friendship with

THE RED RESISTANCE
Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, gives a speech to the British-China Friendship Association in London, 1952. Johnson accused the Americans of employing "germ warfare" against the enemy in Korea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JAPAN

NORTH AND SOUTH
The Korean War broke out when communist troops surged over the 38th Parallel separating the two Koreas. Both sides' fortunes ebbed and flowed over the following three years

DIVISIVE FIGURE
The Labour councillor and anti-war campaigner Monica Felton. After Felton visited North Korea, one Conservative MP suggested that she should be tried for treason

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/BATTLEFIELD-DESIGN.CO.UK

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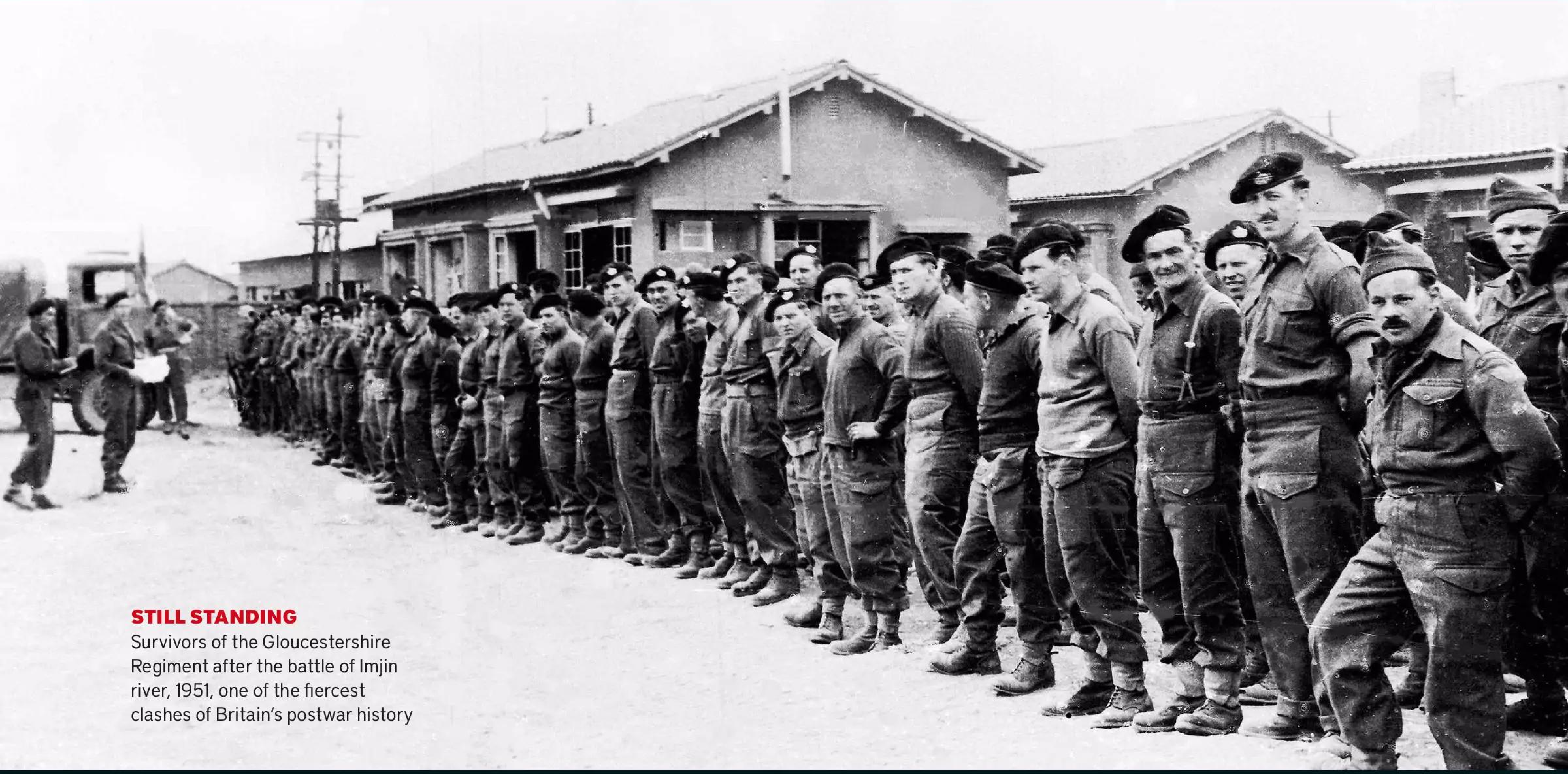
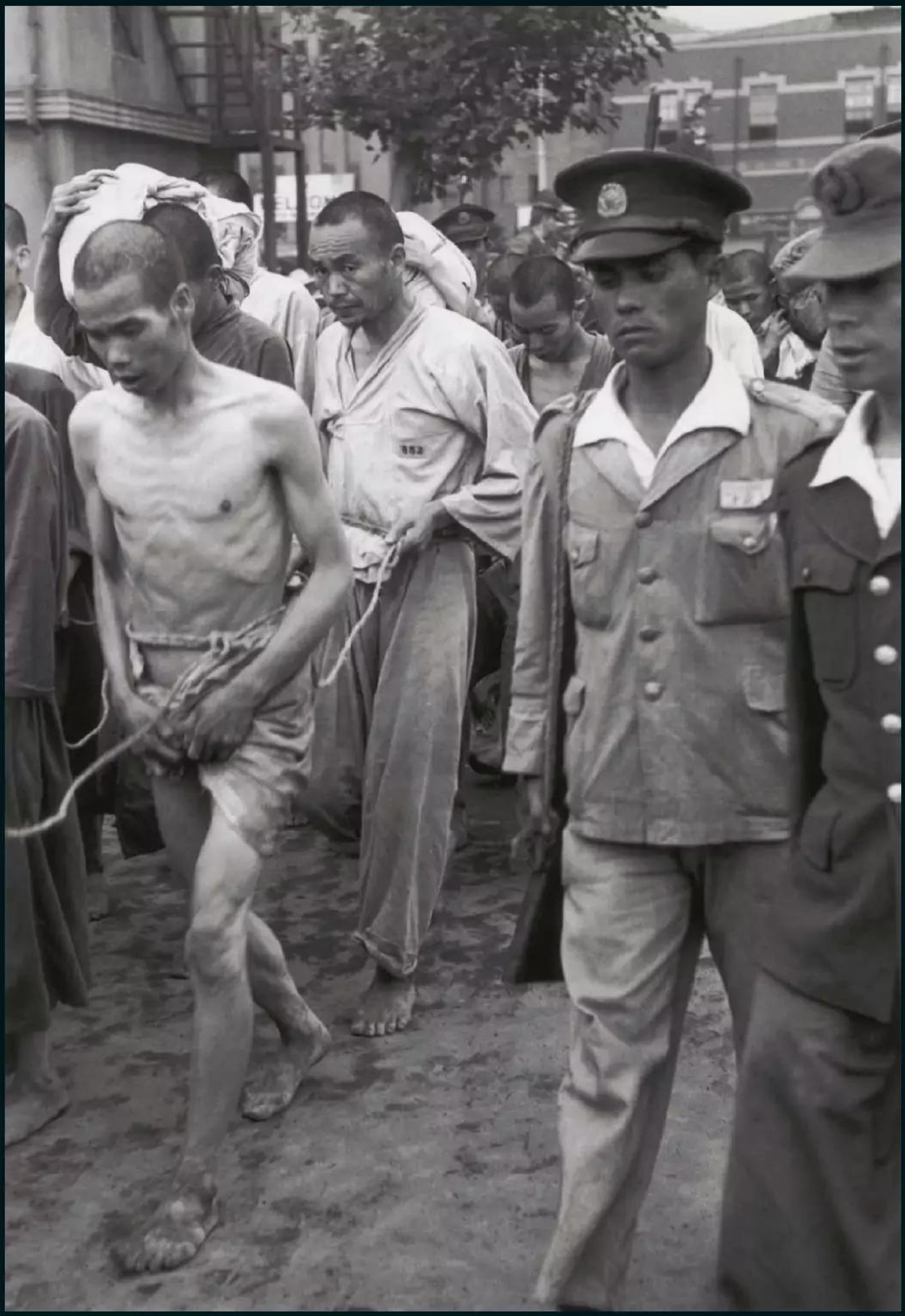


STILL STANDING
Survivors of the Gloucestershire Regiment after the battle of Imjin river, 1951, one of the fiercest clashes of Britain's postwar history



THE UNVARNISHED REALITY
This photograph, taken by Bert Hardy for the *Picture Post*, shows political prisoners in South Korean custody, Pusan, September 1950. The *Picture Post*'s editor, Tom Hopkinson, was sacked for refusing to withdraw images of South Korean atrocities and poor conditions in UN-run camps

MIND CONTROL
The Manchurian Candidate (1962) turned fears of the brainwashing of PoWs in Korea into a Hollywood hit

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

The war did not fit with Britain's postwar vision of itself, so it slipped through the net of national memory

While Carne and his fellow PoWs were being held captive, the nature of the war changed again. With the sweeping retreats and advances of the first year of the conflict being largely replaced by patrols and skirmishes around the frontline – amid lots of watching and waiting – the war now lacked the narrative arc to capture the public imagination. As a result, it gradually slid off the front pages of newspapers.

Above all, there appeared to be a growing disconnect between the war's stated objectives and the reality of what was unfolding on the ground. One soldier wrote in 1951 that "the events of spring have gone" and the "futility of it becomes more and more apparent every day". Korea did not match up with his idea of what war should be. That sense of futility was only exacerbated by Britain's recent experience of conflict. The Korean War was fought in a very long shadow – one cast by the Second World War. Keith Taylor remembered how the reservists in his battalion "had seen it all before", having carved out distinguished careers between 1939 and 1945, and "one acknowledged their great experience".

Back in Britain, too, Korea was often compared with the struggle against Nazism: in July 1950, the social surveying organisation Mass Observation captured many responses that referenced the Blitz, mass mobilisation and fears about the prospect of returning to air-raid shelters. Aerial bombing was never a real possibility, but that didn't stop people feeling that it was. In comparison with the vast scale and clear moral imperatives of the fight against fascism, the Korean War appeared ambiguous and distant.

Thirst for drama

Of course, this sense of remoteness and futility didn't apply to everyone. For many of Britain's National Service conscripts, Korea offered a break from the monotony of their temporary military life. Lieutenant Gary Smith wrote to his family that the outbreak of war "is a wonderful opportunity to travel which I probably wouldn't have had otherwise" and was desperate to get to Korea before it was "just policing". For many, this thirst for drama went unquenched. As early as July 1951, the two sides had begun to negotiate, discussions that seemed to stretch on and on. One particular sticking point was the repatriation of prisoners of war: should Chinese and North Korean PoWs held by the UN be automatically repatriated back to their home countries when many had been forced to fight in the first place? China (and the Geneva Convention) suggested yes, but the United States was reluctant. The experience of British prisoners of war would have a particular cultural and political impact domestically. After their repatriation, military authorities interviewed many former British PoWs and began to hear more about their experiences. Some had been forced to take part in extraordinary 're-education' classes in Chinese-run camps, asked to produce 'confessions', keep diaries and even take part in classes on the communist system.

Most took this 're-education' with good humour or bemusement, but some listened. One, Royal Marine Andrew Condron, even opted to travel to China at the end of the war to see a communist society in action. In 1961, it was discovered that British diplomat and secret service agent George Blake, who had been imprisoned during the Korean War, had become a Soviet double agent. His dramatic escape from Wormwood Scrubs prison in 1966 caused even greater consternation, and led many to ask: what exactly had happened in those camps?

A new word emerged that would have a long cultural afterlife. In 1950, American writer Edward Hunter wrote of "brainwashing", a term based on the Chinese word *hsi-nao*, to describe these mind-control methods. While the scientific community largely distanced itself from this idea, its cultural power was immense: it featured in films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *The Ipcress File* (1965) and was repeatedly used by politicians, commentators and ordinary people throughout the late 20th century to describe seemingly inexplicable changes in viewpoint. It remains one of the most enduring legacies of the Korean War today.

There were other sensational stories that brought the Korean War briefly back to the front pages. Tom Hopkinson, the editor of the magazine *Picture Post*, was sacked for refusing to withdraw photographs of atrocities committed by South Korean forces and poor conditions in UN-run PoW camps. Opposition to the Korean War was an important prelude to the oppositional politics of the peace movement – most obviously the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which organised its first Aldermaston March in 1958. But, for all this, the anti-Korean War movement never gained the same momentum as the anti-nuclear or anti-Vietnam campaigns. In the words of the historian Charles Young, the war's subtleties and ambiguities failed to offer a "usable past" in the way that other 20th-century conflicts did.

A sharp contrast

The uneasy armistice signed at Panmunjom on 27 July 1953 did little to provide clarity. In fact, as no peace treaty was signed, the war technically continues to this day. Soldiers returned home to "utter apathy on the part of the public", the *Yorkshire Post* and *Leeds Intelligencer* noted. Popular culture dwelt little on the experiences of Korean War veterans. There was but one British film on the war: *A Hill in Korea* (1956), starring a young Michael Caine, fresh back from National Service in Korea himself.

Many veterans did not seek out their comrades again until they were retired, forming the British Korean Veterans Association in 1981. Some returned to the Korean peninsula, where they marvelled not only at South Korea's economic progress in the decades after the war but the generous reception they were given by the country's people. It contrasted sharply with their remembrance back in Britain. But despite decades of oversight, there are tentative signs that Britain's amnesia over the Korean War is clearing. December 2014 saw the unveiling of a memorial to the conflict on London's Victoria Embankment, and Korea has gained greater visibility in drama and television – there was even a traumatised veteran in *Call the Midwife*.

Few people still know the names of Monica Felton and Hewlett Johnson. But their stories tell us something of how the Korean War influenced life back in Britain. In Stevenage, a pair of almond trees planted in Felton's memory forms one of the only reminders of this fascinating chapter in Britain's Cold War history.

"It was like trying to use a flamethrower to weed a flower border"

Over half a century ago, as a young reporter, **MAX HASTINGS** witnessed the horrors of the Vietnam War at first hand. In this 2018 interview, he spoke to Rob Attar about his major history of the conflict, and some of the big questions that arose from his research

DOOMED TO FAILURE
Combat helicopters fly over US troops during a search and destroy mission, South Vietnam. Despite their military might, argues Max Hastings, the Americans were doomed to fail during the Vietnam War

GETTY IMAGES

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IN CONTEXT

Vietnam at war

At the conclusion of the Second World War, Vietnamese communist and nationalist forces led by **Ho Chi Minh**, and known as the **Viet Minh**, declared independence from the country's French colonial masters. **France** fought a protracted but ultimately unsuccessful campaign to retain control, finally acknowledging defeat after a disastrous reversal at **Dien Bien Phu** in 1954. The subsequent peace agreement led to what was intended to be a temporary division of the country, which left North Vietnam under Viet Minh control, whereas South Vietnam was home to France's ex-allies in the country. Soon, communist guerrillas known as **Viet Cong** began waging an armed insurrection in **South Vietnam**, which the regime struggled to deal with.

Concerned about the spread of communism, the **US** offered increasing amounts of aid to South Vietnam, which developed into a major military commitment by the mid-1960s, with hundreds of thousands of American troops serving in the country. Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese received aid from **China** and the **Soviet Union**. Despite US military might, the insurgency continued and in January 1968 the major **Tet Offensive** by communist forces revealed the continued strength of the Viet Cong and North Vietnam.

Growing US domestic opposition to the conflict, which had extended into neighbouring **Cambodia** and **Laos**, prompted peace talks between the US and North Vietnam, eventually resulting in a 1973 ceasefire and US withdrawal. However, the communist forces continued their campaign against South Vietnam, reunifying the country in 1976. In a conflict studded with brutality, more than **2 million Vietnamese lost their lives**, alongside **55,000 American servicemen**.

Rob Attar America became entangled in Vietnam following a disastrous French attempt to prevent Indochina gaining its independence. Was the French campaign doomed from the outset?

Max Hastings One of the most extraordinary aspects of postwar French history was the fact that they fought these ferocious battles in Indochina [the area of south-east Asia that contains Vietnam] – and then in Algeria – to try to hang on to an empire that it was obvious to most people was doomed. You could only sustain these European empires in faraway places with some degree of popular acquiescence and this was completely destroyed by the experience of the Second World War [where Vietnam had been administered by Vichy France at the behest of Japan]. George Orwell memorably said the quickest way to end a war is to lose it and in Indochina the French took eight years to do so in what was a messy, bloody, murderous business. I don't think that the French would have tried it but for the fact that they had been so humiliated by their experience of occupation and defeat by the Nazis that they were desperate to restore *La Gloire*. De Gaulle foolishly overruled the views of some of his advisors in 1945 that they would have to talk to the Viet Minh. Instead, he decided to fight it out. The result was a disaster.

Having seen what happened to the French, why did the Americans still decide to get involved militarily?

The Americans have always had a deep belief in their own exceptionalism. They came to believe that the French had lost their war to the communists because they were French, while they, as Americans, were imbued with this virtue that they wanted to introduce democracy and bring good things to the people of Indochina.

Yet underlying everything that the Americans did from 1954 onwards was their desire to contain China. They were absolutely convinced – completely wrongly, as I showed in the book – that the Russians and Chinese were pulling the strings on Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese nationalists as their puppets. One of the huge ironies is that all through the war, with all their vast intelligence machine, the Americans never really understood that the Russians, especially, loathed the Vietnam entanglement but felt that, as the leaders of the so-called socialist world, they had to go on supporting the North Vietnamese. As for the Chinese, they had just gone through the Korean War and the last thing they wanted was another big war on the Asian continent. The Americans didn't understand this and thought that staying in Indochina was about containing communist aggression, whereas it was overwhelmingly a nationalist cause.

Why was it that the Americans couldn't overwhelm a poorly resourced foe?

The fundamental reason that the communists won in Vietnam was because they were Vietnamese. After 1945 Ho Chi Minh achieved ownership of Vietnamese nationalism, and he maintained this for the following 25 years. Even after Ho died in 1969, nothing the Americans did was able to shake that.

What was extraordinary was that, even in 1965, the Americans understood that the so-called Saigon government they were supporting was paper thin. It wasn't a real government: it was a load of crazy generals. It was terribly unpopular. But the Americans believed that, with their military superiority, it didn't matter that they were supporting a rotten regime. They were wrong. It was like trying to use a flamethrower to weed a flower border. They were using completely the wrong tools. The Americans could go on killing Viet Cong, they could go on killing North Vietnamese, but they didn't have a coherent strategy, and that was always the problem.

And although Americans always professed to loathe colonialism, in a way their approach was profoundly colonialist. One veteran who made a great impression on me was a former medic called David Rogers who told me about a time when he and his infantry company were out on a sweep north of Saigon with some Viet-

> **The communists were better soldiers. A lot of them were far more experienced than the Americans**

FORCED TO FIGHT
Newly drafted US soldiers at Fort Jackson army base, South Carolina, 1967

INITIAL RECEIVING POINT
U.S. ARMY RECEPTION STATION

MILITARY ADVANTAGE
North Vietnamese troops in training. "Even though they didn't have anything like the Americans' firepower, they were extraordinarily skilful," says Max Hastings

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

LANGUAGE BARRIER
A South Vietnamese soldier and an American military advisor communicate with sign language, 1963

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

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STOP THE DRAFT
Activists with the Women's Strike for Peace attempt to storm the Pentagon in 1967, one of many protests against the conflict in Vietnam that year

TRICKY TERRAIN
A US soldier uses an M16 rifle to haul his colleague out of mud, near Saigon, 1967

namese soldiers. They stopped somewhere and on the radio the Vietnamese's American advisor said over the radio, in front of everyone: "OK, guys I've got to go now, I'm with the little people." David Rogers heard that and he saw the reaction among the Vietnamese. A little while later, a Vietnamese officer who had become his friend said: "David, we must go now because we are only the little people." Now if you treat people like that, then it ain't too surprising that you lose your war.

How do you rate the military ability of the North Vietnamese?
There is no doubt that the communists were better soldiers. They knew the country and a lot of them were far more experienced than the Americans, who typically only spent a year there, whereas they had been fighting for years on end. Even though they didn't have anything like the Americans' firepower, they were extraordinarily skilful.

One thing the communists did have was the AK-47 and it was really in this war that it became the most famous gun in the world. The Americans had the M16 rifle, which is a terrific bit of kit if you are on a firing range – far better than an AK-47. But if you drop an M16 in the jungle, or it gets mud in it, the whole thing will seize up. In contrast, the AK-47 was designed in the Soviet Union for use by ignorants and it was so simple and brilliantly machined that even if you dropped it in a river, and it got covered in mud and sand, it would go on shooting. For jungle warfare it was a far better gun than the M16 and a lot of the Americans got a sort of inferiority complex about that. They found themselves going into battle with cleaning rods taped to the stocks of their guns because they knew they were going to jam and the only way to clear them was by – in the middle of a battle – pushing a cleaning rod up the barrel to try to get the spent case out.

Was the Vietnam War unusually savage or is its reputation due more to the media coverage it received?
If you had lived through the Thirty Years' War, or a lot of the Second World War, then you would have seen just the same terrible things happening. But in the Second World War, nobody showed newsreels of the thousands of hookers hanging around Piccadilly Circus to pick up Americans, or British or American soldiers shooting prisoners. What was different about Vietnam was that, in the new mood of revelation in the 1960s, the realities of war were brought brutally home.

While the anti-war movement was naive, one thing they were right about was the simple fact that the war was a catastrophe

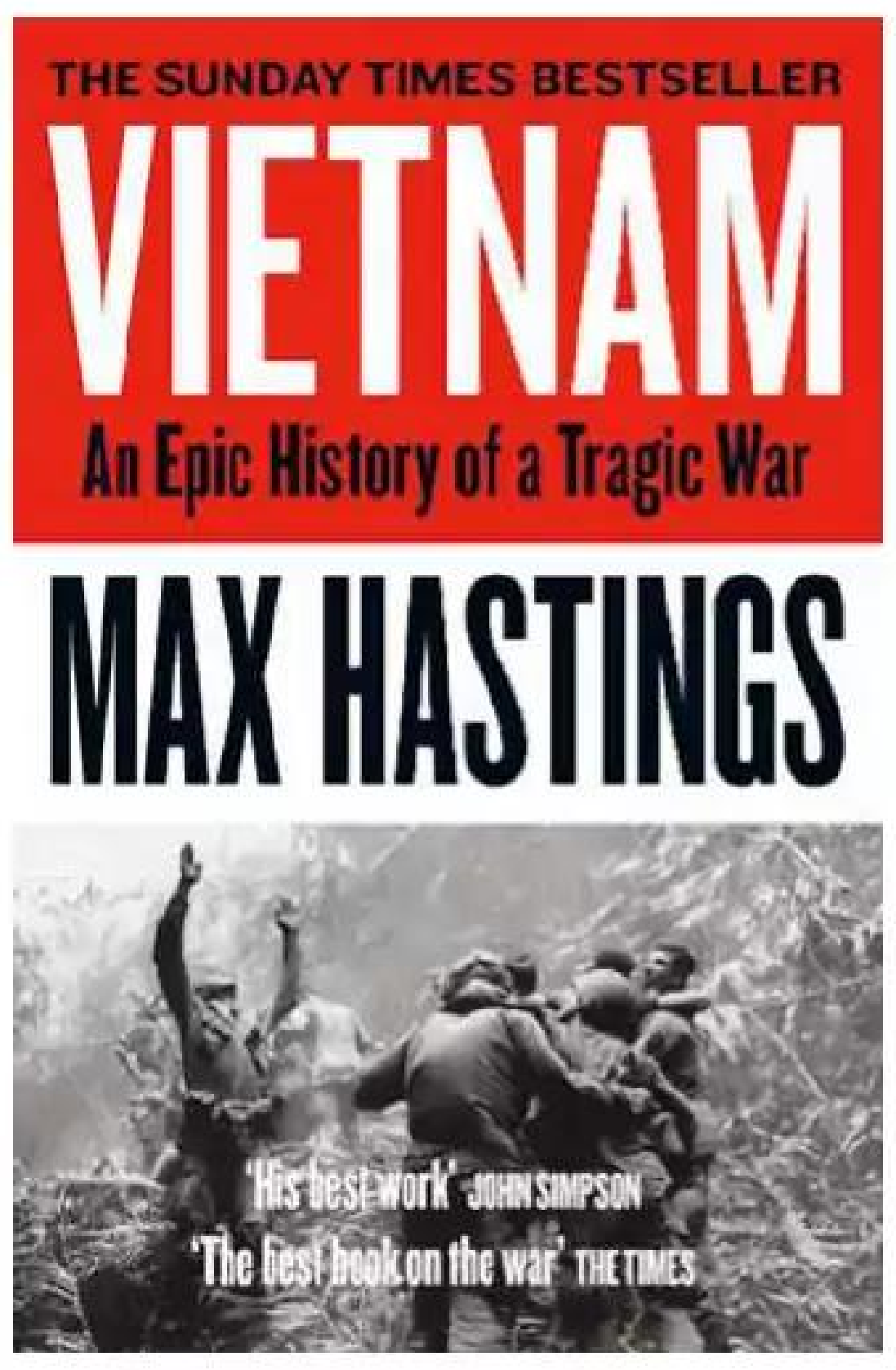
The communists had a policy of silence and they wouldn't let anyone into North Vietnam who wasn't a known sympathiser. So when they buried landlords alive, for example, they did not record it on camera. But all the dreadful things – and they often *were* dreadful things – that the Americans and South Vietnamese were doing were all recorded. There are some of the most notorious photographs from history. These images forced the western public to face up to the horrors of war, but it was a very selective view because it didn't show the horrors inflicted by the other side.

I myself always remember one moment when I was working in Vietnam. I used to find it absolutely thrilling to fly around in 'Huey' helicopters – I thought it was all very exciting. And when you are 24 years old and an ambitious journalist, you are thrilled that someone is paying you to do this, and you don't think too much about having your head blown off. But one day in 1972 or '73, I was in a jeep driving north of Saigon, trying to look at a battle we came across, when we had to stop because there was a South Vietnamese army patrol dragging onto the road a group of communists whom they had killed in an encounter during the night.

I remember watching them dragging one half-naked corpse whose guts were spilling out about 10 feet behind him. And, as they dragged this corpse, I thought that if I got shot in the guts and I was being dragged, then that's how I would look. It was the beginning of a sort of growing-up process for me. I went on doing a lot of war reporting, but I made a personal journey from an ignorant teenager thinking there might be something romantic about war to someone who understands that it is actually unbelievably ghastly.

Why do you think the Vietnam War stirred up so much opposition in the US and around the world?
One has to remember that this was in the sixties, which was a time of revolt against capitalism and imperialism, and all sorts of other things that the war seemed to represent. It was also a time of extraordinary naïvety among the young. They convinced themselves that people like Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara were great heroes but were oblivious to the fact that, even in those days, a lot was known about Castro's extraordinarily repressive regime in Cuba and the fact that Stalin and Mao were the greatest mass murderers in the 20th century, after Hitler. So it was a time of great naivety, it was a time of generational revolt – and Vietnam seemed a symbol of everything the older generation was getting wrong.

But while the anti-war movement was incredibly naive, one thing they were right about was the simple fact that the war was a catastrophe, it was crazy. Passions were also stirred by the fact that a lot of the people doing the fighting were draftees, whereas in recent years, not only are the casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq much smaller, these wars are all being fought by professional soldiers who want to be there. That creates a different mood from the fact that the kids in Vietnam didn't want to be in Vietnam, and felt miserable about risking their lives. ●


THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER
VIETNAM
An Epic History of a Tragic War
MAX HASTINGS
'His best work' JOHN SIMPSON
'The best book on the war' THE TIMES

Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War
by Max Hastings
William Collins, 2019, 752 pages, £12.99

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE **BERLIN WALL**

The Berlin Wall is the great icon of the Cold War. But how did it happen? Here we analyse the brinkmanship, machinations and top secret manoeuvres that led to its construction

BY **PATRICK MAJOR**

THE GREAT DIVIDE West Berliners peer over the newly constructed wall at the boundary between the districts of Kreuzberg and Mitte, August 1961

GETTY IMAGES

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On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. This reinforced concrete edifice, the arch-symbol of the Cold War, had been toppled from within, by a mixture of people power on the streets and mistakes at the top by the East German communist party.

Although the wall's days were probably already numbered, the speed with which it fell seemed to confirm the cock-up theory of history. Günter Schabowski, the party's press spokesman, turned what was supposed to be an orderly queue at police stations for passports into a stampede for the border checkpoints after mistakenly declaring that all restrictions on travelling abroad were lifted with immediate effect. The party seemed to have finally fallen victim to its own mismanagement, unequal to the challenge of reform from above started by Soviet bloc leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Less than a year later the German Democratic Republic (GDR) would have disappeared within a united Germany. This incompetence was in marked contrast, however, with the story of the wall's rise on 13 August 1961.

Berlin had been a peculiar space ever since the end of the Second World War. It was a quadripartite 'island' city run by all four occupiers, each with its own sector, but enclosed within the Soviet zone and over 100 miles from the western zones of America, Britain and France. In retaliation against moves towards a separate West German state in 1948, Stalin had exploited West Berlin's exposed position by cutting off its land links to the west. But, after nearly a year-long airlift, West Berlin had emerged as a permanent thorn in the side of the surrounding East Germany. The CIA and MI6 used it as a forward espionage base; its economy attracted tens of thousands of East German commuters; and permanent leavers could easily cross the sector boundary to West Berlin (often little more than a white line in the road) and then fly out from Tempelhof airport with impunity to the west.

Human cordons

On the night of 13 August 1961 this loophole behind the Iron Curtain was closed with dramatic suddenness. From 1am human cordons of East German border police and factory militiamen descended on the Soviet sector boundary to face down the West Berlin police and American, British and French troops. Large stockpiles of barbed wire, as well as wire mesh fencing and concrete posts, were rapidly erected just within the eastern sector, sometimes with the help of lampposts and tramlines welded into improvised barriers. Four days later, with no western counter-measures, the East German authorities started a more permanent structure of breeze blocks and concrete slabs: the Berlin Wall proper.

In one fell swoop, the GDR had put an end to a human exodus under way since 1945, but which had reached epidemic proportions in the summer of 1961. Dubbed by the party Republikflucht, or 'flight from the Republic', one in six East Germans had left for the west, the majority via Berlin.

From 1958 the communist authorities had become particularly alarmed at the numbers of doctors, teachers and engineers leaving. Despite a carrot-and-stick policy, they were unable to deter these defections while maintaining the open border which Berlin's special quadripartite status demanded. From May 1960 the Stasi, the feared secret police, had been drafted in but could intercept only one in five, concluding that "a comprehensive sealing-off of West Berlin is not possible and therefore the combatting of Republikflucht cannot be left to the security organs of the GDR alone".

In one fell swoop, the German Democratic Republic had put an end to a human exodus under way since 1945

A more radical solution was needed, involving a physical isolation of West Berlin, a one-way valve that would keep East Germans in the east, but would not deny the west access to East Berlin. The East Germans had privately toyed with this idea throughout the 1950s, but had been vetoed by the Soviet big brother in favour of a diplomatic solution. The price Moscow and the fellow eastern bloc were paying, however, was seemingly endless subsidies to the leaky East German ally, in the form of raw materials and now even guest workers.

In May 1961 the East German leader, Walter Ulbricht, formally petitioned Moscow to close the border, but it was only after Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev's confrontational first meeting with the new US president, John F Kennedy, in June, followed by the latter's uncompromising television address in late July, that the Kremlin leader relented. The decision to build a wall thus came very much at the 11th hour, but had to be conducted in extreme secrecy, so as to avoid a stampede for the exit.

The day after Kennedy's address, on 26 July, Khrushchev instructed the Soviet ambassador to tell Ulbricht that "we have to use the tension in international relations now to circle Berlin in an iron ring. This must be done before concluding a peace treaty". In effect, the Soviet leader was short-circuiting the diplomatic crisis which he himself had unleashed in November 1958 when issuing an ultima-

East German leader Walter Ulbricht declares: "No one has the intention to erect a wall" at an international conference, June 1961

ALAMY

GROWING RESENTMENT Children play on the west side of the Berlin wall in 1986. By 1988 travel concessions had eased, and over 1.5 million trips were made from east to west

THE WALL IN CONTEXT

How Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* helped to destabilise the GDR

First and foremost, the wall stabilised the GDR's domestic crisis. Whereas from 1949–61 around three million citizens had fled, this fell between 1961 and 1989 to 35,000 (but at the cost of at least 140 lives at the wall). Economic planners no longer had to factor in 'natural wastage', and by the mid-Sixties supply did improve, although not overnight as party propaganda suggested.

The border closure was also used to grasp other nettles: military service was introduced for young men; the recently collectivised farms were consolidated; there was an attempt to improve productivity on shop-floors with a Production Drive; and, more surreally, television aerials capable of receiving western programmes were targeted by bands of young communists, sometimes saw in hand. Rather soon, however, the party realised that it could not rule by force alone. The majority of the 7,000 persons arrested in August 1961 were soon released, and in 1963 the GDR entered a period of cultural thaw, including officially sanctioned Beatlemania.

The wall was also significant in foreign policy terms. Despite the official protests by the western Allies, there was secret relief that the second Berlin Crisis had ended peacefully. The wall also created a shift in thinking from its biggest West German opponent, the Social Democrat Willy Brandt.

In the mid-1960s he and his adviser Egon Bahr advocated a 'policy of small steps' which culminated, once chancellor, in Brandt's conciliatory *Ostpolitik* in the early 1970s, a policy of rapprochement continued by the Christian Democrats in the 1980s.

The resulting travel concessions allowed close family members to cross the wall. Although held at about 40,000 trips per year, these mushroomed in the 1980s to over 1.5 million by 1988.

For some, the wall was already effectively open. Yet the selective nature of the opening caused great resentment among the majority without western relatives, indicating that, in the long term, *Ostpolitik* actually helped to destabilise the GDR, not prolong it as some critics have suggested.

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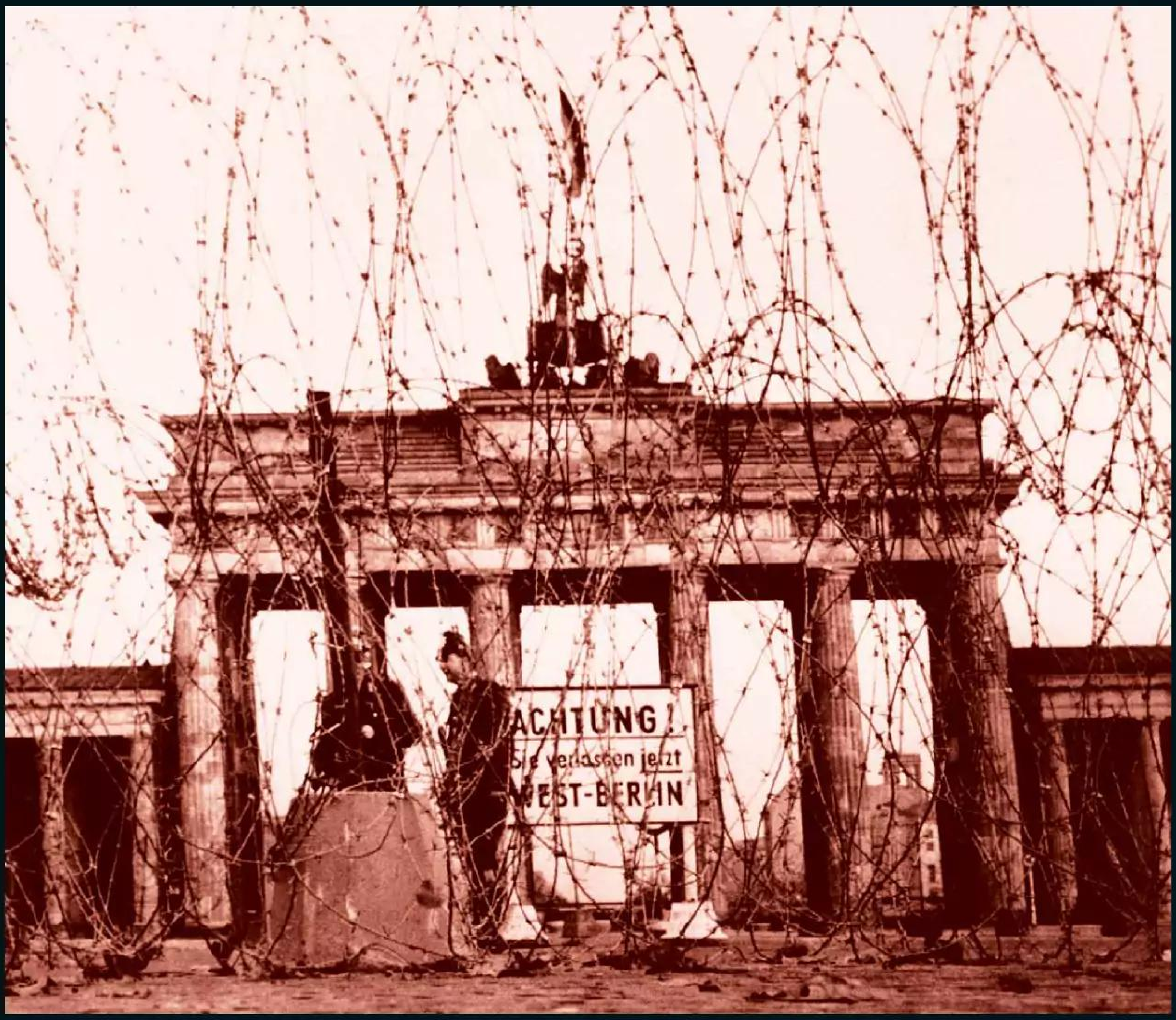
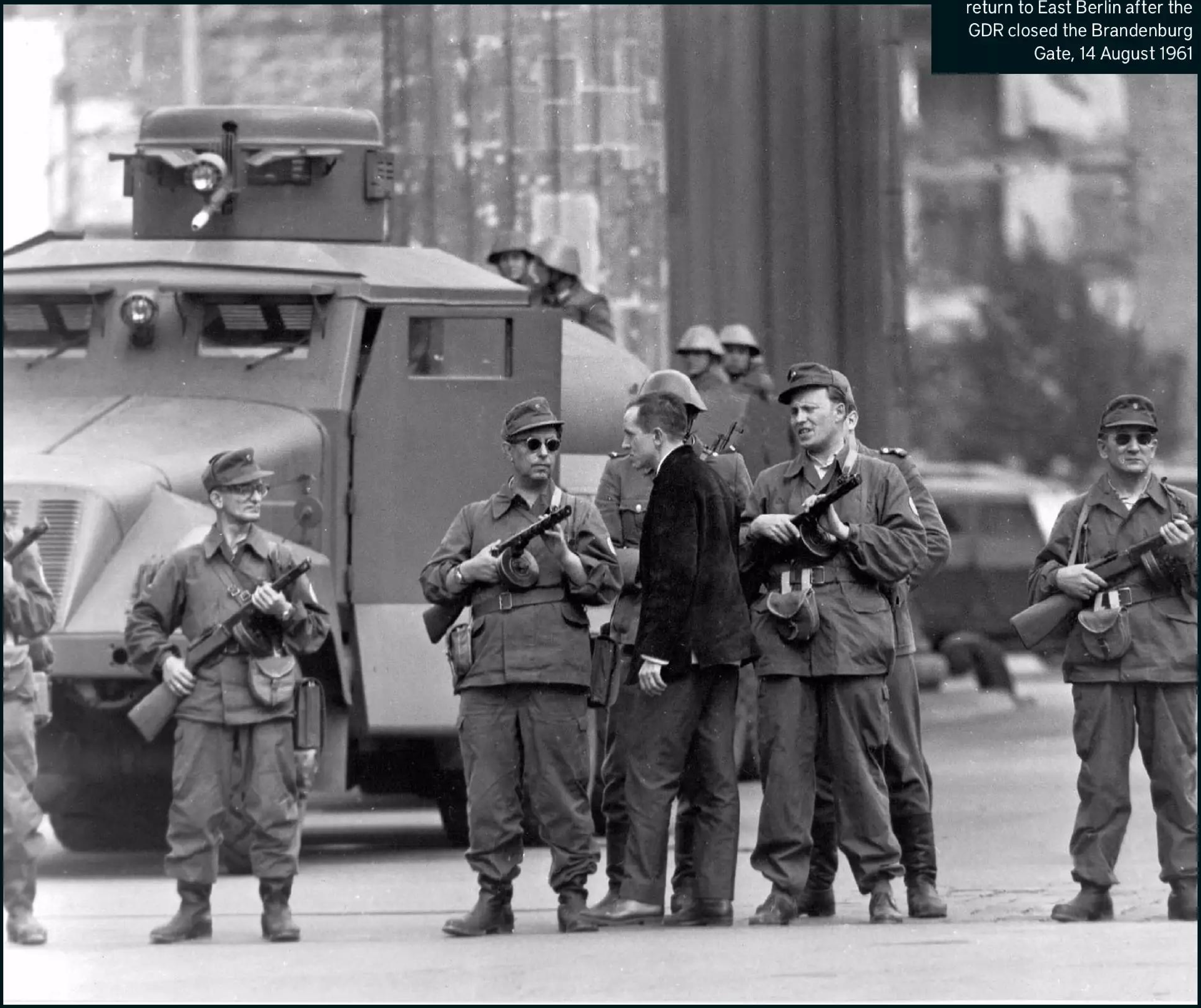


BARBED BARRICADES
Barbed wire barricades near the Brandenburg Gate, erected by West Berlin police on 31 October 1961. The barrier was put up on the orders of British military command



POINT OF NO RETURN
A man pleads in vain with East German militia as he tries to return to East Berlin after the GDR closed the Brandenburg Gate, 14 August 1961

ALAMY

President Kennedy’s speech had made it clear that America was prepared to go to war to defend West Berlin

tum to the western powers to vacate West Berlin, or accept a peace settlement that would have forced them to recognise what they regarded as an illegitimate Soviet puppet state: the ‘so-called’ German Democratic Republic.

GDR sovereignty would have given the East Germans direct control over the transit autobahns between West Berlin and West Germany, as well as over the air corridors that had kept the western sectors alive during the airlift of 1948. East Germany effectively could have started a second Berlin blockade. Kennedy’s speech had made clear that America was prepared to go to war to defend West Berlin, but any commitments to an open East Berlin had been conspicuous by their absence. A free hand was implicitly being given to the communists in their sector.

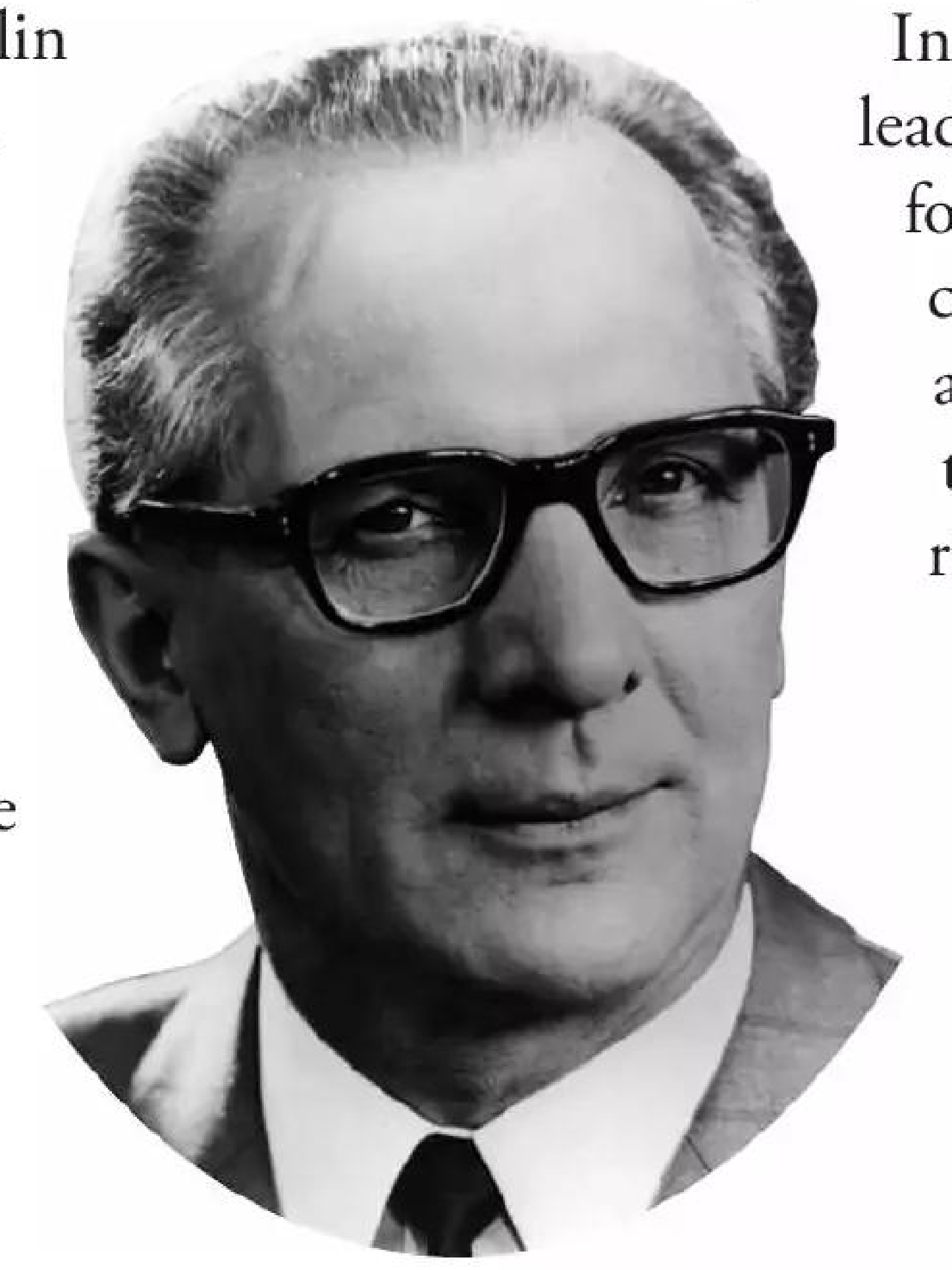
From this point on Operation Rose, the plan to cut off West Berlin, was developed rapidly under strictest secrecy. The normal chain of command was circumvented, and altogether perhaps 60 GDR officials were let into the secret. The chief of ground operations would be Erich Honecker, number two in the East German Communist party, but destined to become GDR leader a decade later. In 1961, hair thinning slightly and behind a pair of severe horn-rimmed spectacles, he was the Politbüro’s security secretary responsible for domestic and military security.

The chosen few

The border closure would take place from a Saturday night to Sunday morning, to avoid potential factory stoppages; the party had painful memories of being caught out itself, eight years earlier, by the mass strikes of 17 June 1953. On 24 July, the party’s security section had calculated that total closure would require 27,000 man-days of labour and almost 500 tonnes of barbed wire.

The chosen few in the interior ministry met at the Volkspolizei’s training college outside Berlin, under Willi Seifert, commander of interior troops, but himself a former Buchenwald inmate, and so with extensive ‘insider’ experience of maximum-security installations. Little by little, fencing stocks were secretly ferried to the capital from other border regions and police units. But this was not just to be a police action. In late July the chief of staff of the Soviet forces, Lieutenant General Ariko, met his East German counterpart, Major General Riedel, to discuss coordinating the ‘iron ring’ of Soviet and East German tanks that was to provide deterrent back up a mile behind the police units. The army duly began conspiratorial planning at Schloß Wilkendorf, north-east of Berlin, where defence minister Heinz Hoffmann, Riedel and 11 other officers drew up a blind order of march, to be conducted in strictest radio silence, right down to such details as muffling tank tracks.

Much of this secrecy was for the benefit of western intelligence. There has been great speculation about how much the west knew in advance. The Americans did have a Kremlin superspy, Oleg Penkovsky, who on 9 August had learned of the impending action, but he was unable to relay the information until after the event. Previous CIA intelligence estimates, as early as autumn 1957 for example, had predicted possible border closure. The British Joint Intelligence Committee reached similar conclusions in February 1959. By 1961, however, CIA analysts were more fixated on what would happen if the Soviets tried a repeat of the 1948 blockade, to drive the western Allies out of West Berlin by attacking transit routes. There were also reports of hoarding of barbed wire, but these were not new and as with most intelligence evaluation, the problem was one of information overload. The western Allies’ military missions, which could conduct roving overt intelligence gathering, found no evidence of the impending action. As the Americans reported on 2 August: “situation largely same as week ago”. On 12 August the British, too, were dismissive of drastic solutions: “The Russians are probably more impressed by the dangers of disturbances if the escape route is completely cut than by the current damage to the DDR”.



Erich Honecker, the GDR’s second in command in August 1961, was one of as few as 60 East German officials to know of plans to build the wall

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More evidence came to light from West German sources, but this too is inconclusive. The Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), West Germany’s MI6, had a large network of anticommunist informants in the GDR, collecting military intelligence. Its head, Reinhard Gehlen, claimed in his memoirs that the BND had reported the action ahead of time on 1 August. Its July 1961 report indeed suggested that closure of the sector boundary was considered a real possibility and imminent.

Despite these seemingly ominous pointers, however, there were contradictory reports. West Germany’s domestic intelligence, the Verfassungsschutz, told Chancellor Adenauer that, although “the island of West Berlin has now become a matter of life or death for the communist regime”, more swingeing travel restrictions would be “intolerable to the whole population”. It therefore seems likely that the intelligence community knew that closure of Berlin was an option being actively weighed and planned for by the east, but was uncertain of an exact date.

“The most important strategic and tactical lesson of the successful action of 13 August”, as their opposite numbers in the Stasi later recorded, “is the importance of keeping secret the point in time, as a decisive prerequisite for further successful blows against the enemy – at the right time and in the right place.”

In advance of a meeting of the top eastern-bloc leaders, on 1 August Ulbricht spoke to Khrushchev for two hours by telephone in a conversation recently discovered in Moscow. After some pleasantries about the state of the GDR’s collectivisation, Khrushchev repeated his call for “an iron ring around Berlin… I think our troops should

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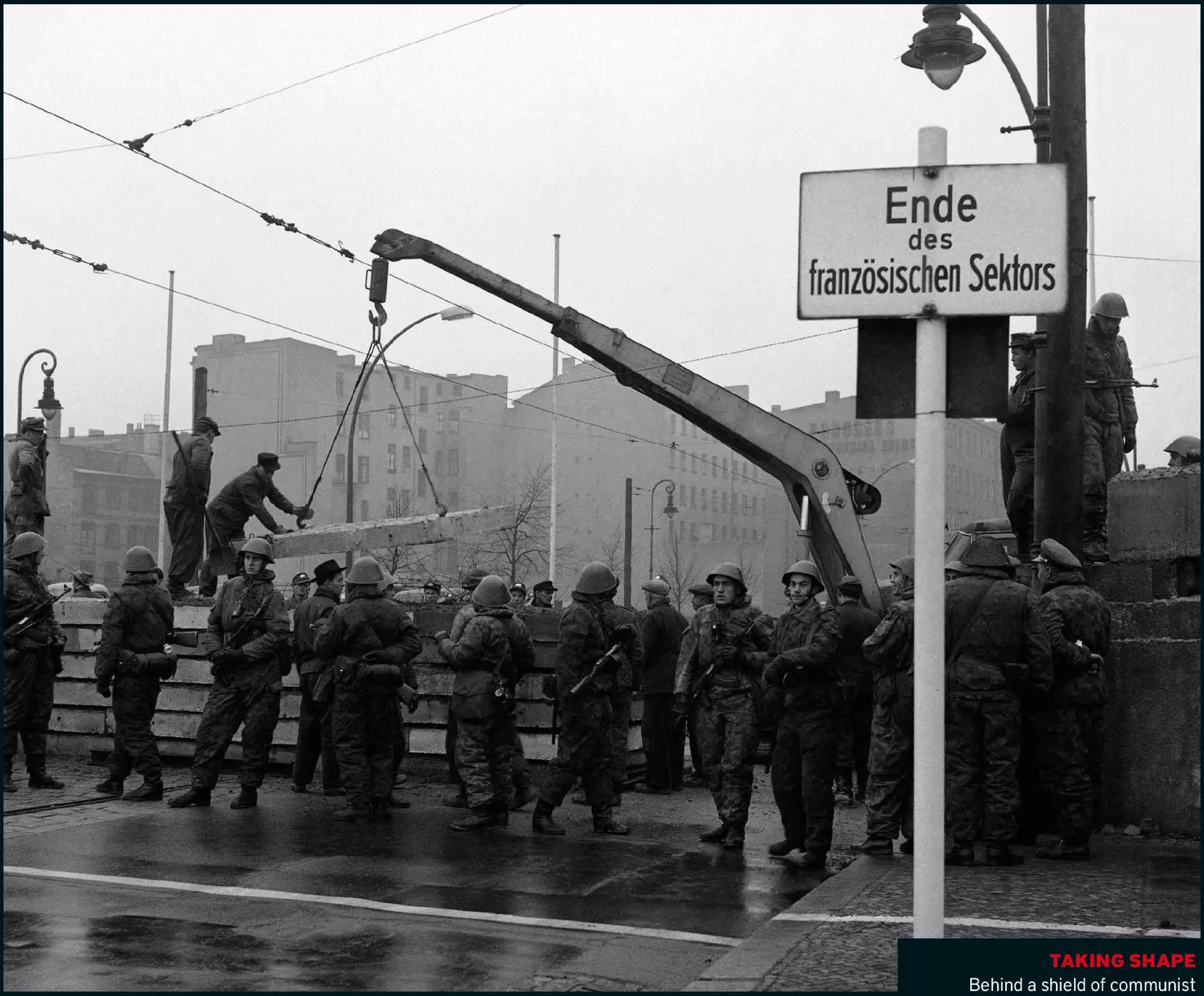
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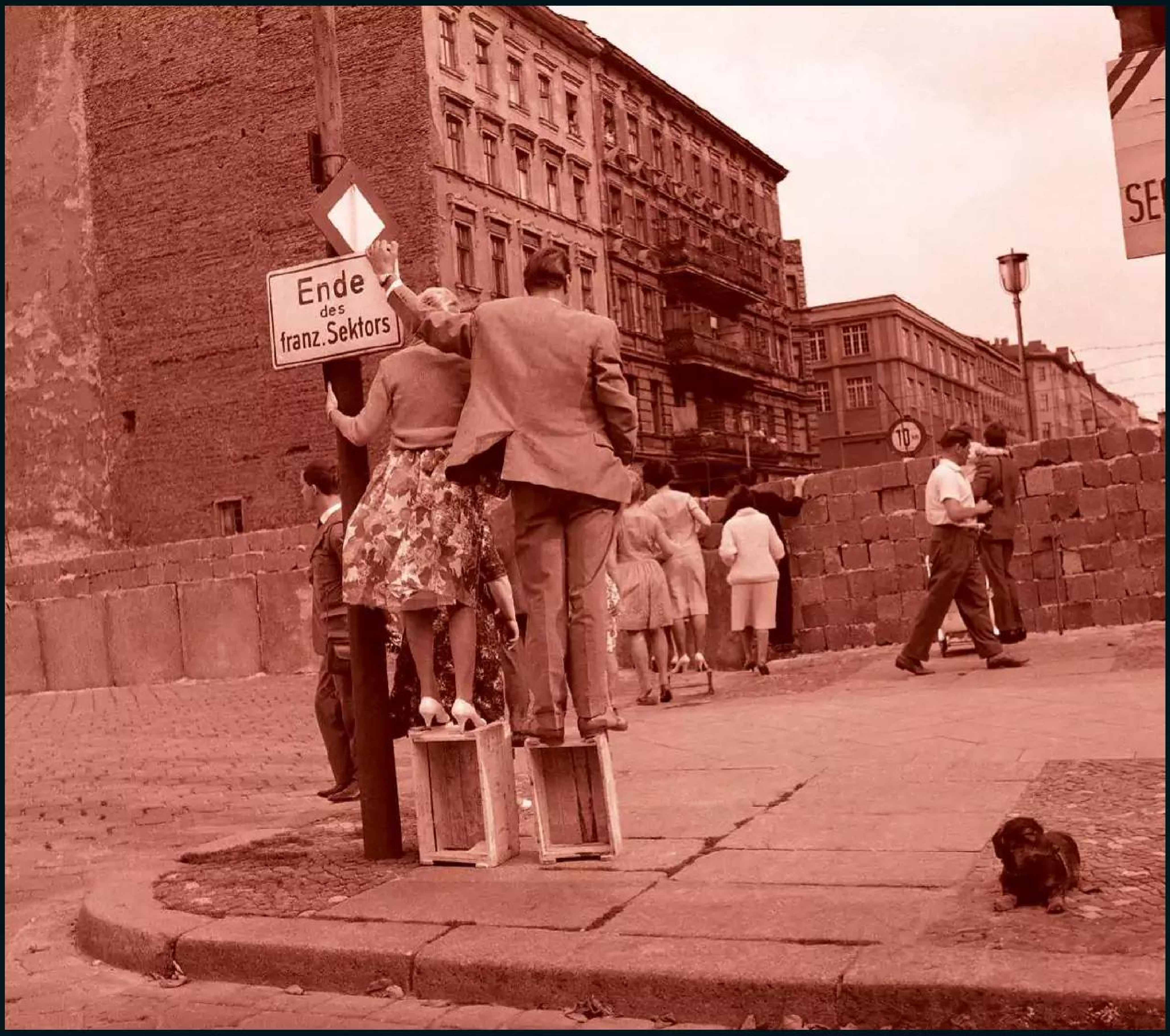
TAKING SHAPE
Behind a shield of communist troops, East German labourers start to build up the wall at the boundary of the French sector in Chausseestrasse, in December 1961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CURIOUS CONSTRUCTION
West Berliners stand on wooden crates for a better view over the wall into East Berlin in August 1961. The most violent reactions to its construction came from young West Berliners in a series of battles with GDR border police

ALAMY

lay the ring, but your troops should control it". Ulbricht was clearly greatly concerned about a western economic embargo of the GDR, and much of his input regarded East Germany's economic plight. The two finally got down to security:

Khrushchev: "I read original reports from western secret services which estimate that the conditions for an uprising have ripened in the GDR. They are using their own channels to keep things from going as far as an uprising because that will achieve nothing. They are saying: we cannot help and the Russians will crush everything with tanks. Therefore they are calling for people to wait until the conditions are right. Is that really true? I don't know for sure and am relying on western reports only."

Ulbricht: "We have information that, slowly but surely by recruiting defectors and organising resistance, the Bonn government is preparing the conditions for an uprising to take place in autumn 1961. We see which methods the enemy uses: the church organises the walk-out of the farmers from the collectives, although with little success; there are sabotage actions… An uprising is not realistic, but actions are possible which could cause us great international damage."

It seems likely that the western intelligence community knew that closure of Berlin was an option being weighed and planned by the east

Shock and disbelief

Even at this stage, however, Ulbricht seemed to be contemplating gradualist measures requiring political preparation. "Carry it out whenever you want," replied the Kremlin leader. "We can fit in at any time." Yet he was more conspiratorially inclined than his East German counterpart: "Before the introduction of the new border regime you should not explain anything, since that would only increase the refugee movement and could lead to a rush… We'll give you one, two weeks so that you can prepare yourselves economically". Khrushchev then raised the four-power status of Berlin: should the border go around Greater Berlin rather than just the western sectors? Yet Ulbricht remained adamant; the border would go right through the city centre: "Above all, it has to happen fast". Khrushchev was confident that the west would not overreact: "When you implement these controls, everyone will be satisfied. Besides, they will get a taste of your power". Ulbricht: "Yes, then we will achieve stabilisation".

Such a matter of war and peace nevertheless required the political backing of the Warsaw Pact. But when it met from 3–5 August, the die had already been cast. Already on the first day, in what was probably a private meeting with Khrushchev, the GDR leader had hammered out the essentials of what was to come, and by then they had a date: 13 August. "We kidded among ourselves that in the west the 13th is supposed to be an unlucky day," Khrushchev later recalled. "I joked that for us and for the whole socialist camp it would be a very lucky day indeed."

On 12 August at around 4pm, Ulbricht signed off on the impending action, then invited government and party officials to his country seat at Lake Dölln, north of Berlin, for a walk and a dinner. Speaking to the Soviet ambassador, the East German party leader, in a rare burst of humour, jested that "I won't let them go until the operation is over. Just in case." The gathered leaders were all slightly bemused by the round of jokes and musical interludes, until at around 9.30pm Ulbricht suddenly convened them into an emergency session of the Council of Ministers to rubber-stamp the measures to come. When the guests broke up towards midnight, the road back into Berlin was already choked with Russian tanks. Operation Rose had begun.

The initial reaction to the wall's building from East Germans was shock, betrayal and disbelief: "a dirty trick" in the words of one, or from another: "One cannot be for peace with tanks". Many East Berliners thought the initial barbed wire a temporary measure, becoming more hostile when permanent obstacles went up on 17 August, and when West Berliners were excluded from East Berlin on 23 August, splitting up whole families.

Although East Berliners were angry, there was no repeat of 1953's insurrection, when half a million strikers had taken to the streets. Now the populace was on the back foot. Instead, young people, who had frequented West Berlin, went into a collective sulk, and middle-class 'waverers' as the party called them, became resigned to socialism in half a country. Party activists, by contrast, went on the offensive, even beating up political opponents. "Dentists", warned one party secretary, "would be getting a lot of work in the near future".

The official rationale, nonetheless, was that the wall, soon labelled the 'Antifascist Protection Rampart', had "saved the peace" by foiling the west's alleged plans to foment a second GDR uprising to coincide with a NATO ground attack. Few East Germans believed this. Willy Brandt, then West Berlin's mayor, saw the new border regime as fascist, not antifascist, the "perimeter wall of a concentration camp".

The most violent reactions came from young West Berliners – both students and teenagers – in a series of running battles with GDR border police. The stationing of Allied troops right up to the wire was as much to deter them as the Volkspolizei on the other side. Since the west's core interests were not touched in West Berlin – there was no interference with the transit routes to West Germany and thus no repeat of the Berlin blockade (the Americans' greatest fear) – John F Kennedy's response was muted: "A wall is not very nice but it's a hell of a lot better than a war". Protests were made, and a morale-boosting tour of West Berlin by Vice President Johnson and the former military governor and hero of the Berlin airlift, General Lucius D Clay.

Privately, the Americans' allies in Berlin – France and Britain – censured Clay's gung-ho tactics, which included a tank stand-off at Checkpoint Charlie in late October 1961 and encouraging vigilante schemes to blow up the wall. But despite official protests, the western powers now had to come to terms with the new concrete reality on the Cold War's frontline, which was to cement geopolitics in place for a generation. ●

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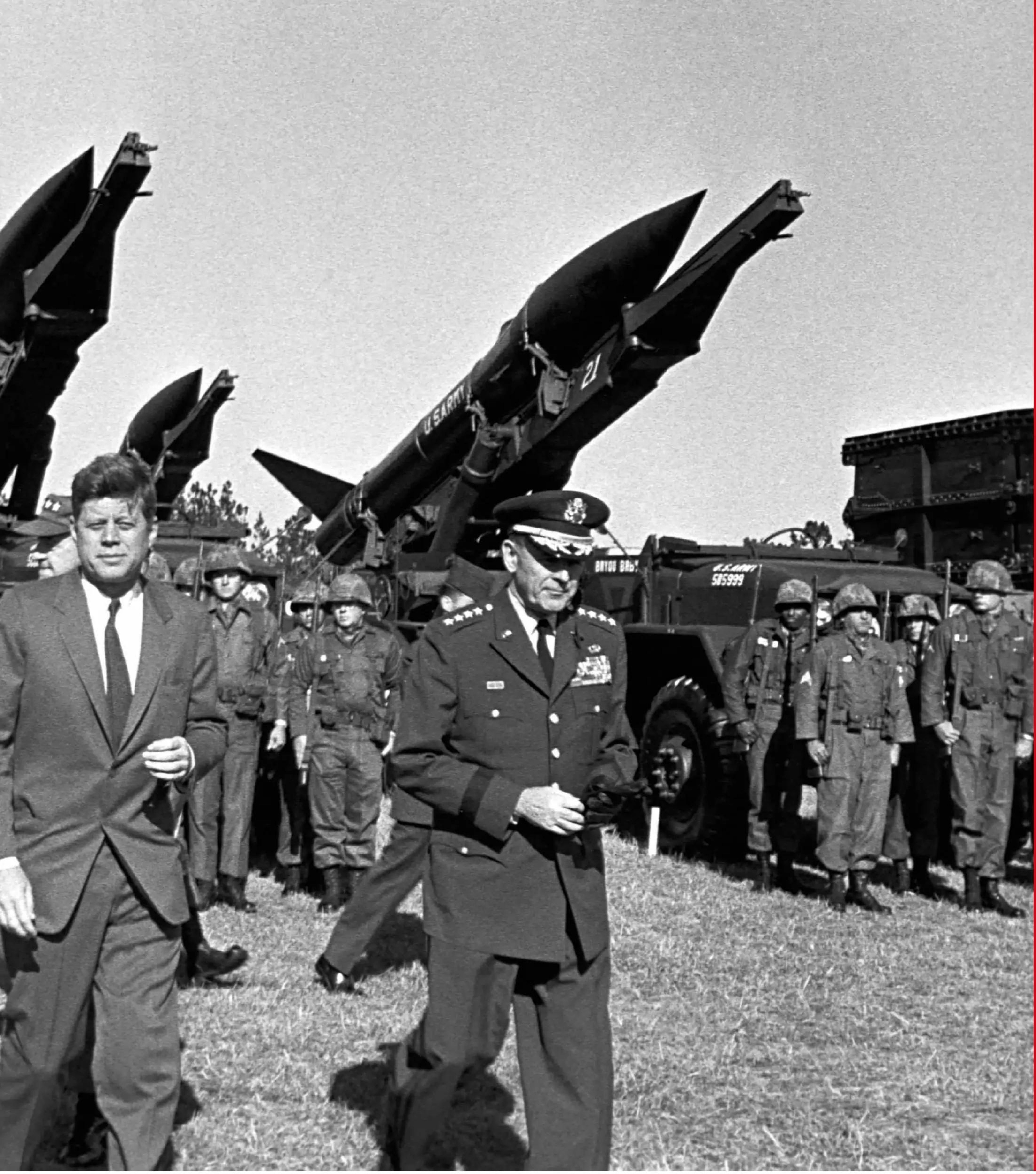
On the brink of nuclear oblivion



SCENES FROM A CRISIS
US president John F Kennedy with senior army officers during an inspection tour of units stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia, in November 1962. Pictured at the rear are nuclear-capable MGR-1 Honest John missiles

The 1962 Cuban missile crisis brought the world to the brink of war – and ended in embarrassment for the Soviet Union. In this visual history, we explore its escalation, the key players, and how disaster was averted

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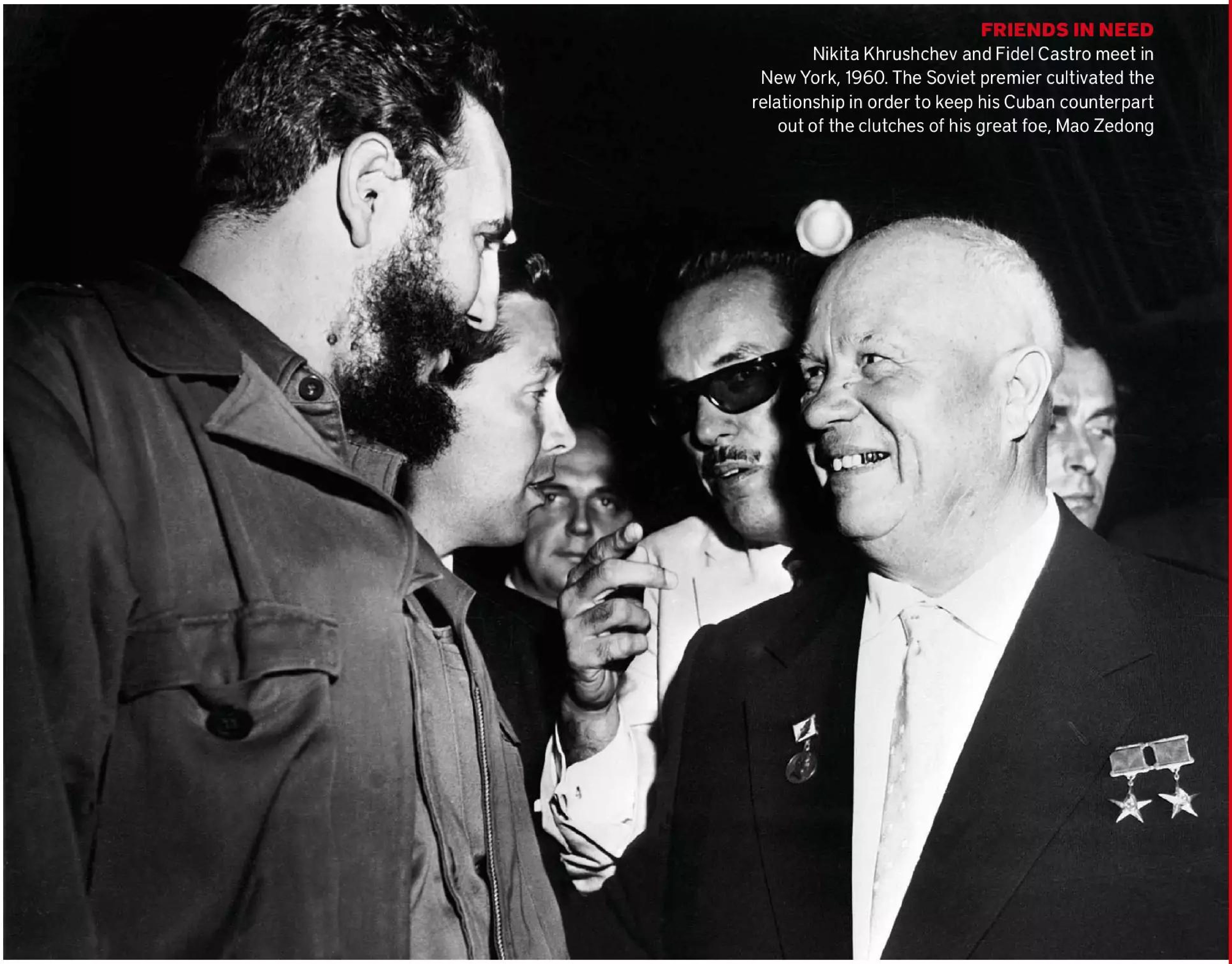
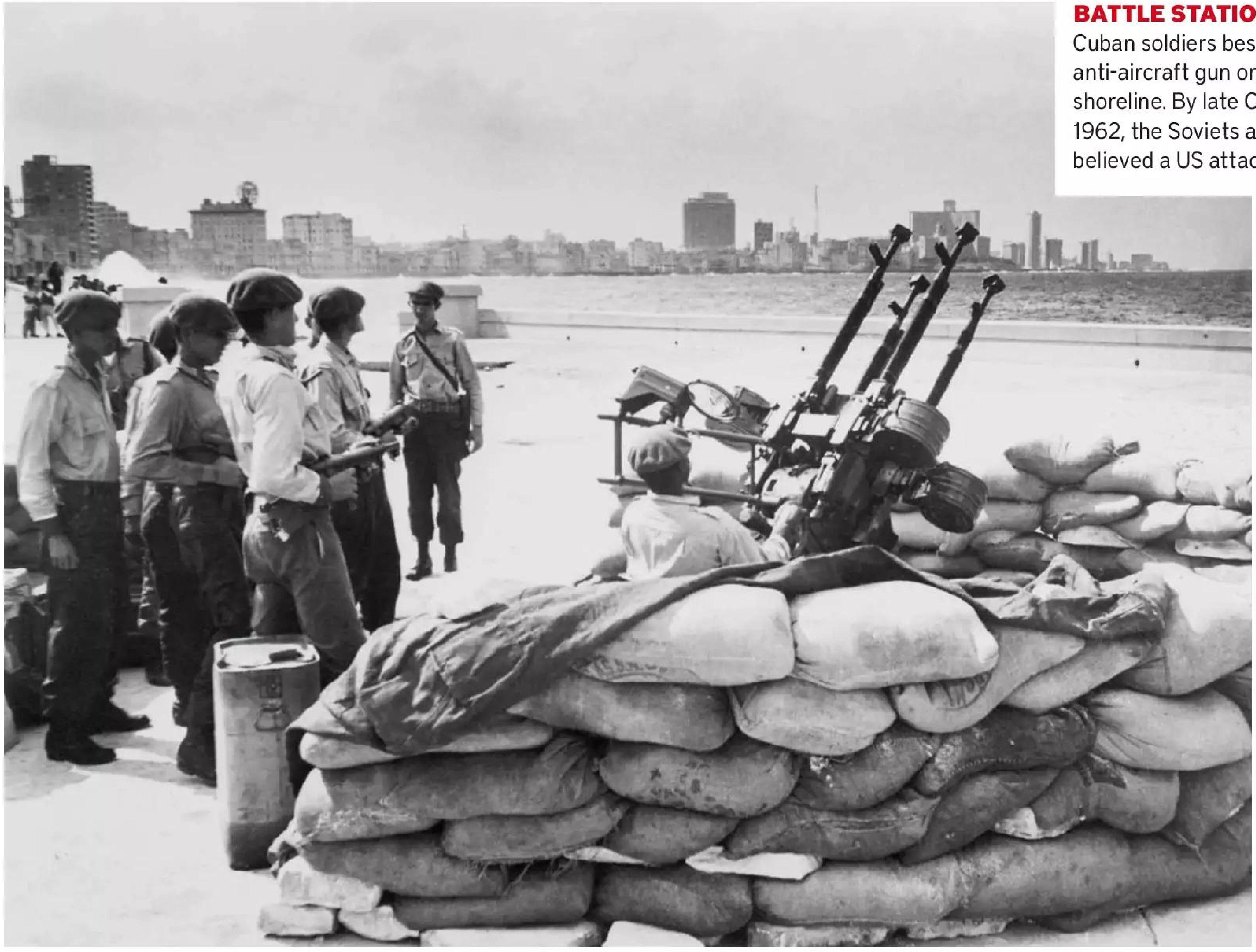


FRIENDS IN NEED
Nikita Khrushchev and Fidel Castro meet in New York, 1960. The Soviet premier cultivated the relationship in order to keep his Cuban counterpart out of the clutches of his great foe, Mao Zedong



BATTLE STATIONS
Cuban soldiers beside an anti-aircraft gun on Havana's shoreline. By late October 1962, the Soviets and Cubans believed a US attack was imminent

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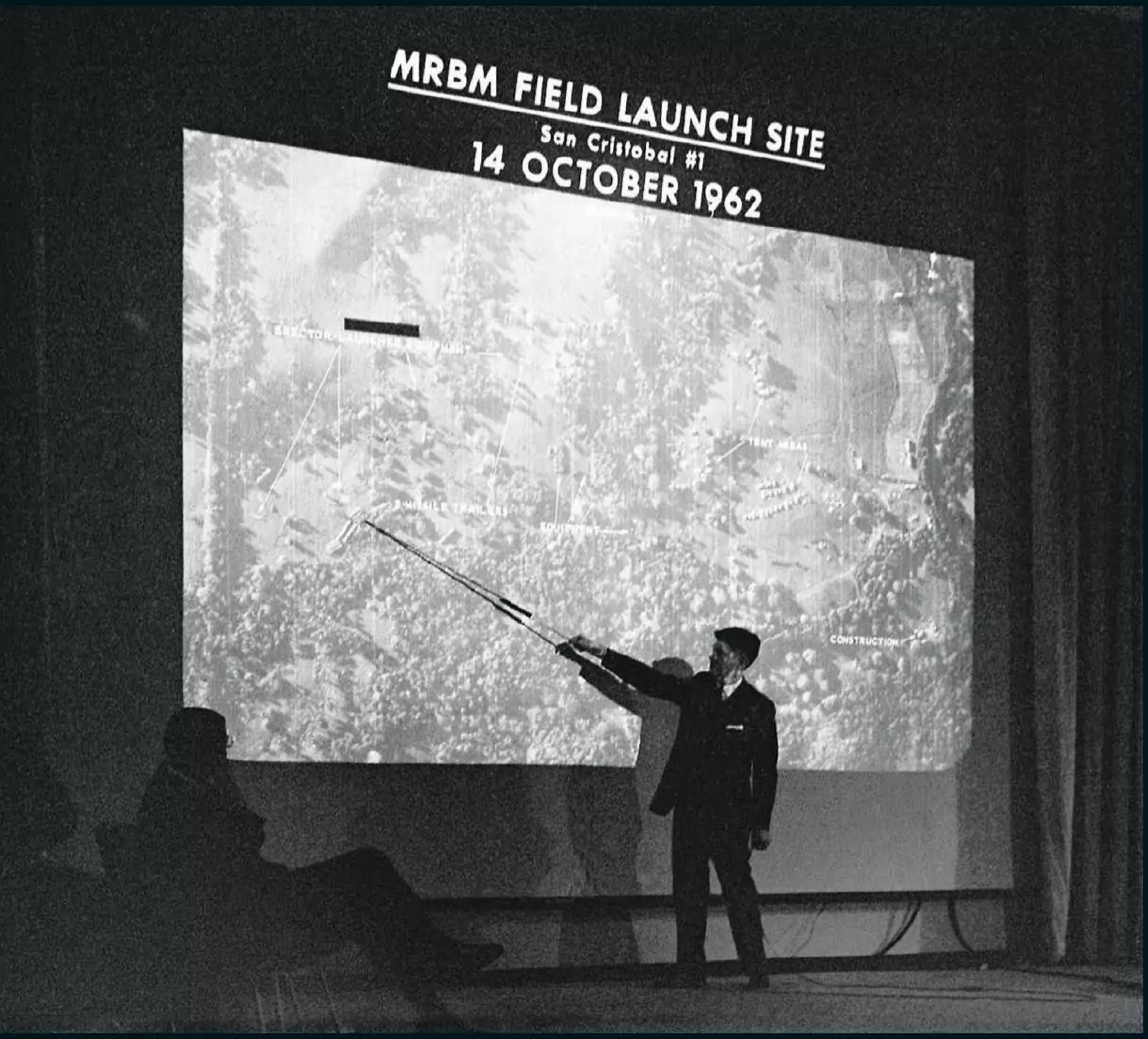
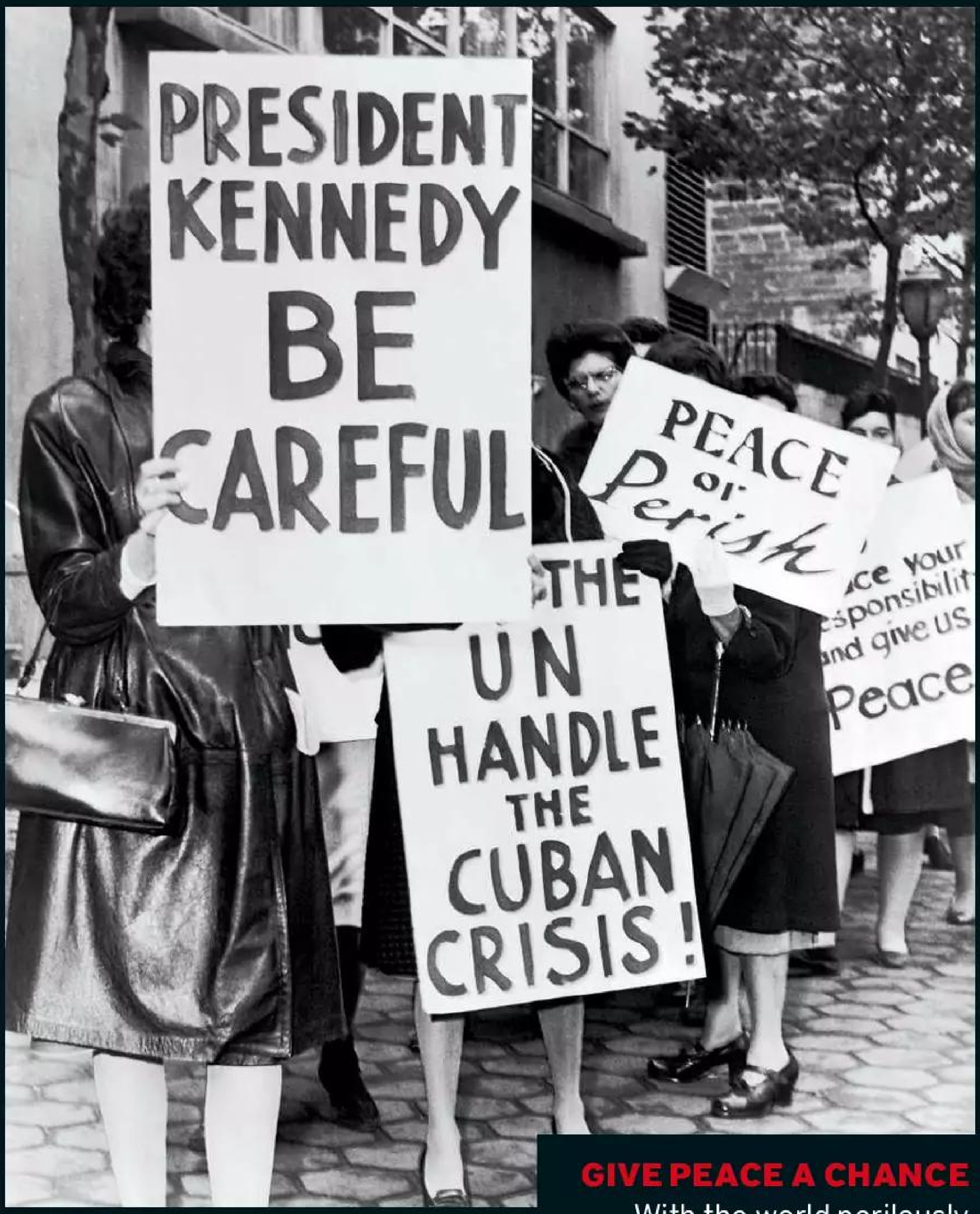

MRBM FIELD LAUNCH SITE
San Cristobal #1
14 OCTOBER 1962

EXPLOSIVE EVIDENCE
An official points to the Soviet ballistic missile launch site in San Cristobal during a presentation at the US State Department in October 1962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Peace

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE
With the world perilously close to nuclear war, members of Women Strike for Peace protest near the United Nations building in New York

RAISING THE ALARM
President Kennedy meeting with members of the US Air Force who flew photo-reconnaissance missions over Cuba and analysed the images. They had spotted the Soviet missiles on 14 October 1962. When informed two days later, Kennedy was stunned by the news

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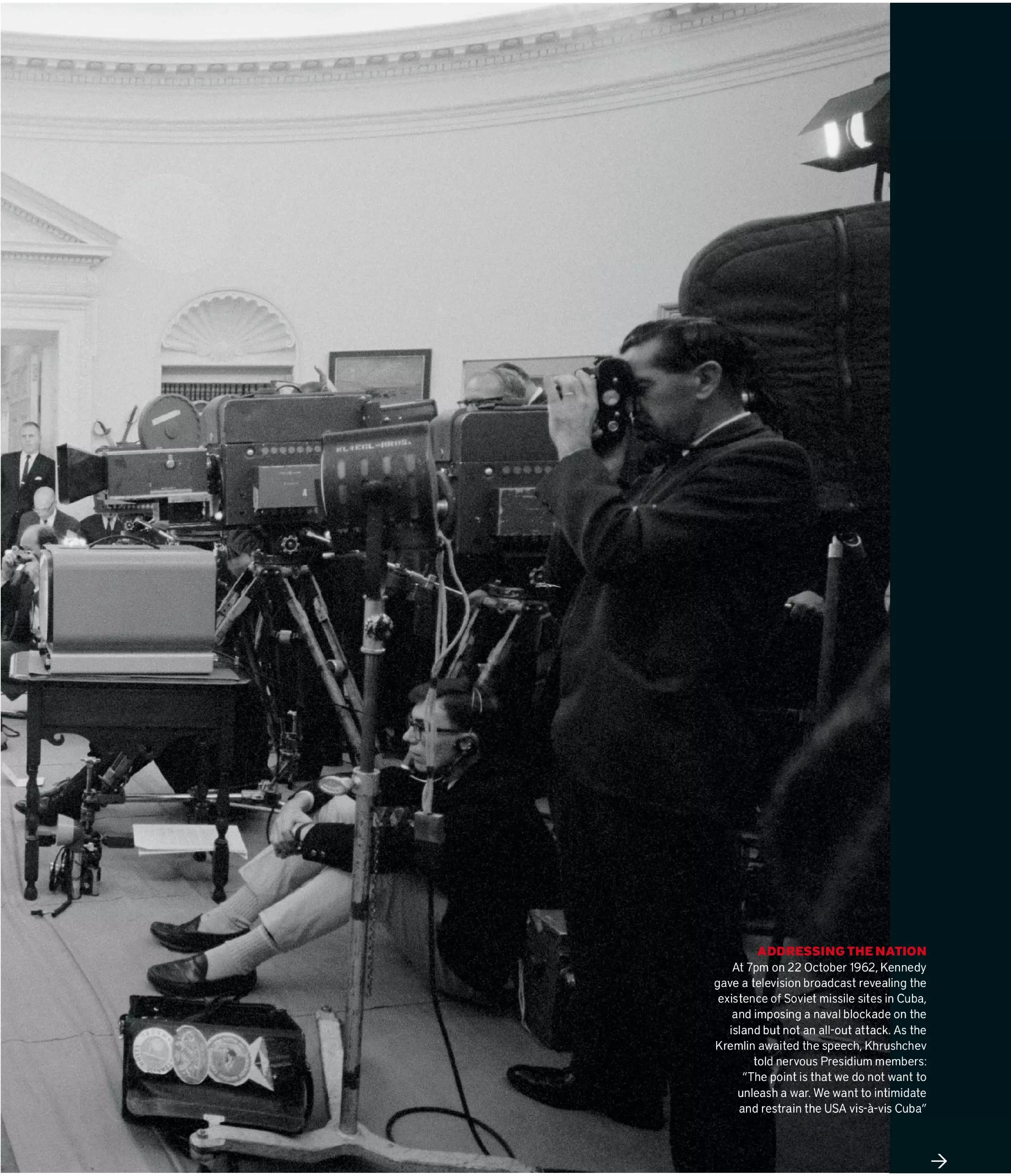
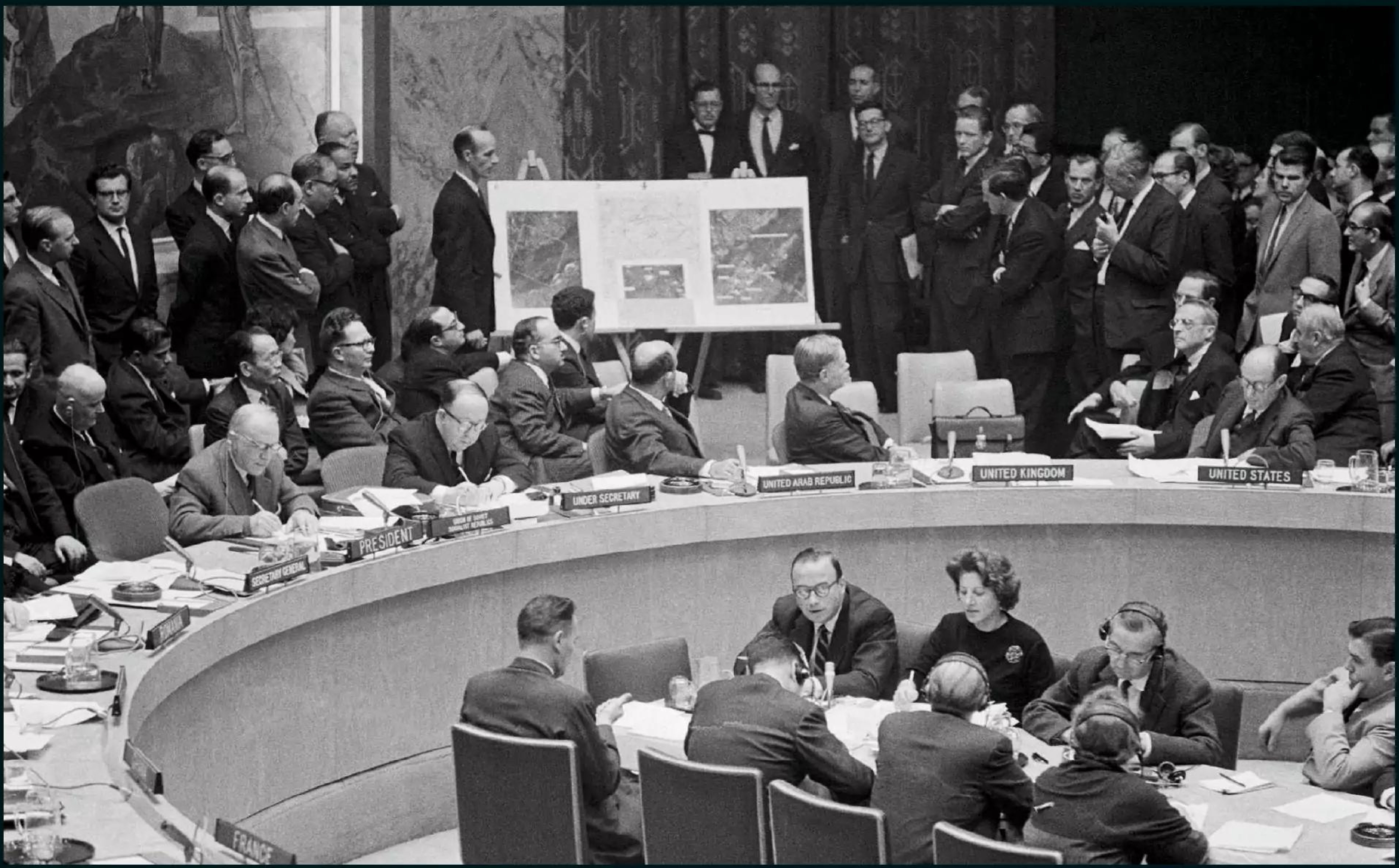
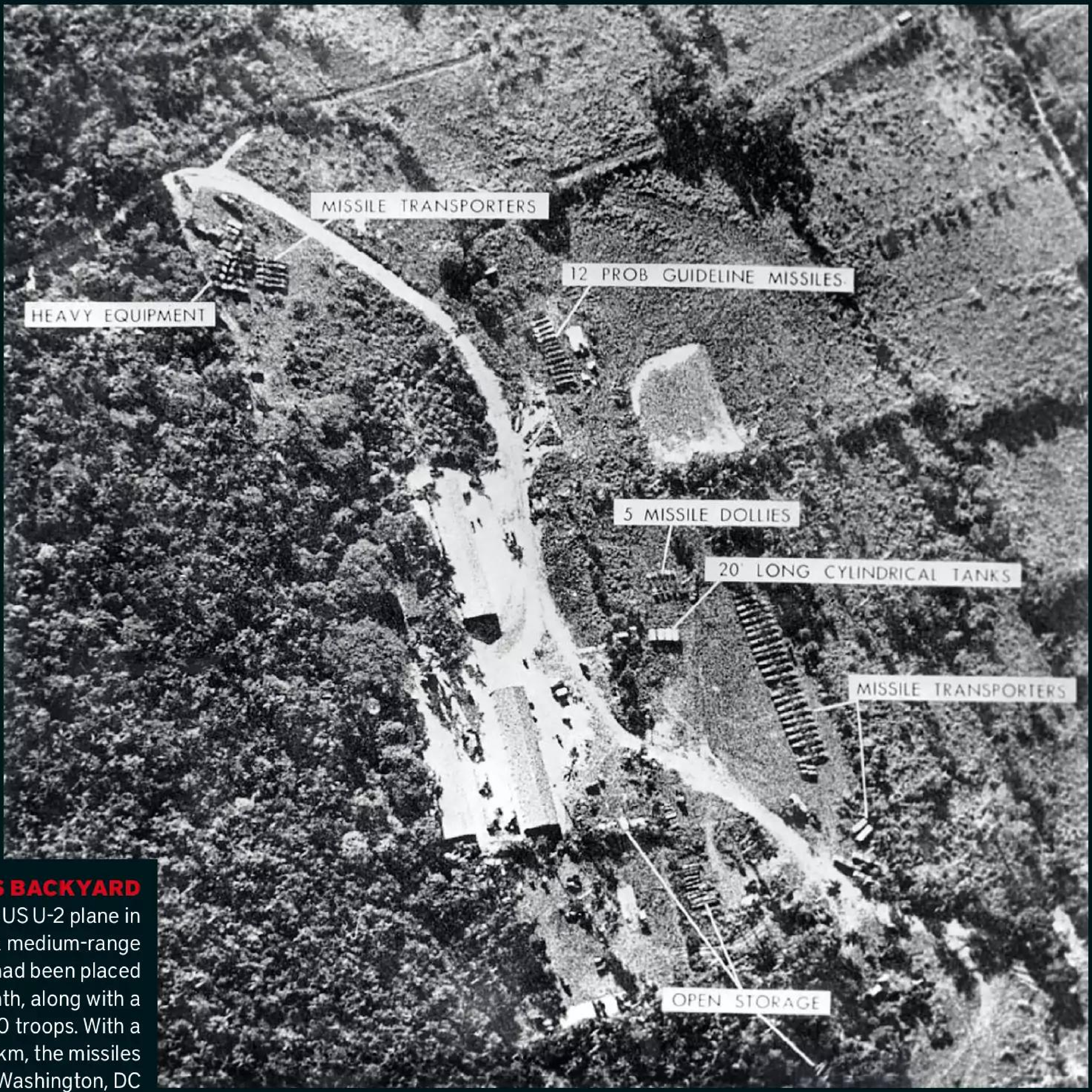

KLIEGL-BROS.

ADDRESSING THE NATION
At 7pm on 22 October 1962, Kennedy gave a television broadcast revealing the existence of Soviet missile sites in Cuba, and imposing a naval blockade on the island but not an all-out attack. As the Kremlin awaited the speech, Khrushchev told nervous Presidium members: "The point is that we do not want to unleash a war. We want to intimidate and restrain the USA vis-à-vis Cuba"


PRESIDENT
UNDER SECRETARY
UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC
UNITED KINGDOM
UNITED STATES
SECRETARY GENERAL
FRANCE

A POLITICAL VICTORY
At a UN Security Council meeting on 25 October 1962, the US ambassador Adlai Stevenson challenged the Soviet Union ambassador Valerian Zorin to deny that the USSR had placed missiles in Cuba. When he refused to answer, photos of the missiles were revealed to the room


MISSILE TRANSPORTERS
12 PROB GUIDELINE MISSILES
HEAVY EQUIPMENT
5 MISSILE DOLLIES
20' LONG CYLINDRICAL TANKS
MISSILE TRANSPORTERS
OPEN STORAGE

IN AMERICA'S BACKYARD
An aerial photo taken by a US U-2 plane in October 1962, showing a medium-range missile base on Cuba. It had been placed there the previous month, along with a Soviet garrison of 40,000 troops. With a range of more than 2,000km, the missiles could have easily hit Washington, DC

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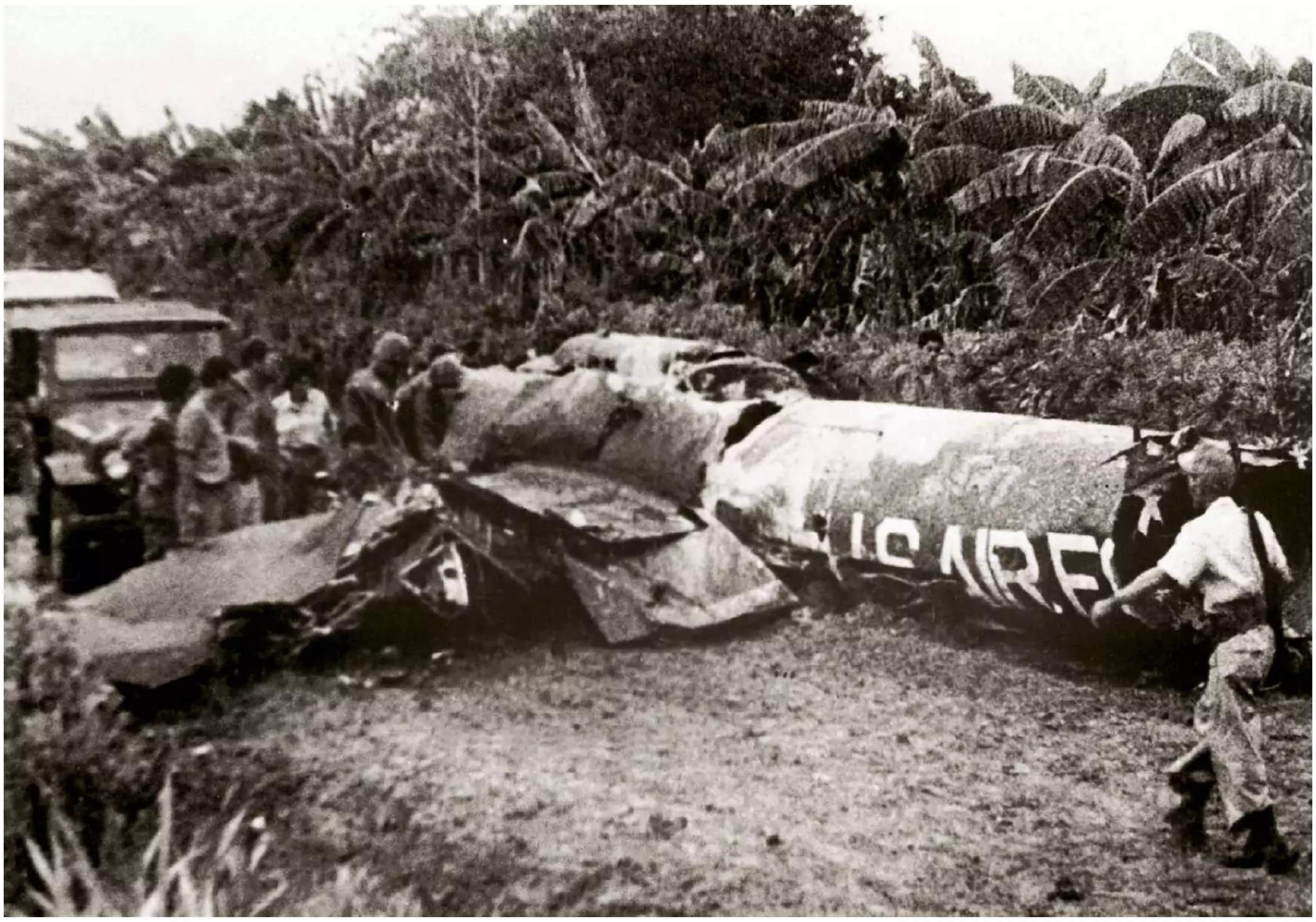

FLASHPOINT
The debris of a US spy plane shot down over Cuba on 27 October. That night, a Soviet submarine captain, believing he was under attack, ordered a nuclear torpedo strike against US ships. Only the refusal of one of the three senior officers to agree to the deployment stopped the strike and averted nuclear war

BEGINNING OF THE END
By 8 November, Khrushchev had consented to Soviet vessels leaving Cuba as part of a deal to bring the crisis to an end. In this picture taken two days later, a Soviet submarine near the Cuban coast controls the withdrawal of the nation's missiles from the island

TRANSFER OF POWER
In October 1964, shaken by Khrushchev's nuclear brinkmanship, defence minister Rodion Malinovsky did not prevent the coup led by the future leader Leonid Brezhnev (left) that removed Khrushchev (right) from power

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VOLATILE SITUATION
Afghan fighters on top of a destroyed Soviet helicopter, 1980. The arrival of Soviet forces in Afghanistan the previous year had complicated an already volatile situation

WAR WITHOUT END

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 is widely viewed through the prism of the great Cold War confrontation between east and west. Yet, as we explore in this feature first published in 2022, the occupation also ignited a tinderbox of local grievances that continue to torment the country

BY **ELISABETH LEAKE**

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On 3 August 1978, the central council of the Islamic Society of Afghanistan (Jamiat-i-Islami) wrote an impassioned plea to Kurt Waldheim, secretary-general of the United Nations. In their letter, they decried Afghanistan's political leaders, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), as a "power-thirsty gang" intent on destroying Afghanistan's political and social fabric and lacking any respect for humanitarian norms or human rights. The Council demanded UN intercession, warning that "the continued survival of this group will endanger the peace of this region of the world".

Within days, 50,000 Soviet troops were in Afghanistan, where they would remain for almost a decade

This warning soon came true. On 24 December 1979, the Soviet Politburo issued a public directive justifying the deployment of Soviet troops into Afghanistan to support their allies, the same PDPA. The Soviets, the Politburo claimed, sought "to give international aid to the friendly Afghan people" and to prevent "anti-Afghan actions from neighbouring countries". Within days, 50,000 Soviet troops were on the ground in Afghanistan. They would remain there for almost a decade as part of Soviet efforts to keep their local allies in power.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was one of the moments that defined the 1980s. It took place against the backdrop of the global Cold War, in which the Soviet Union and the United States (as well as China) vied for supremacy. Indeed, so international was the Cold War during the 1970s and early 1980s that, while US and Soviet leaders pursued talks on limiting strategic arms and the balance of power in Europe, Soviet forces backed independence movements in southern and eastern Africa as American troops withdrew from Vietnam.

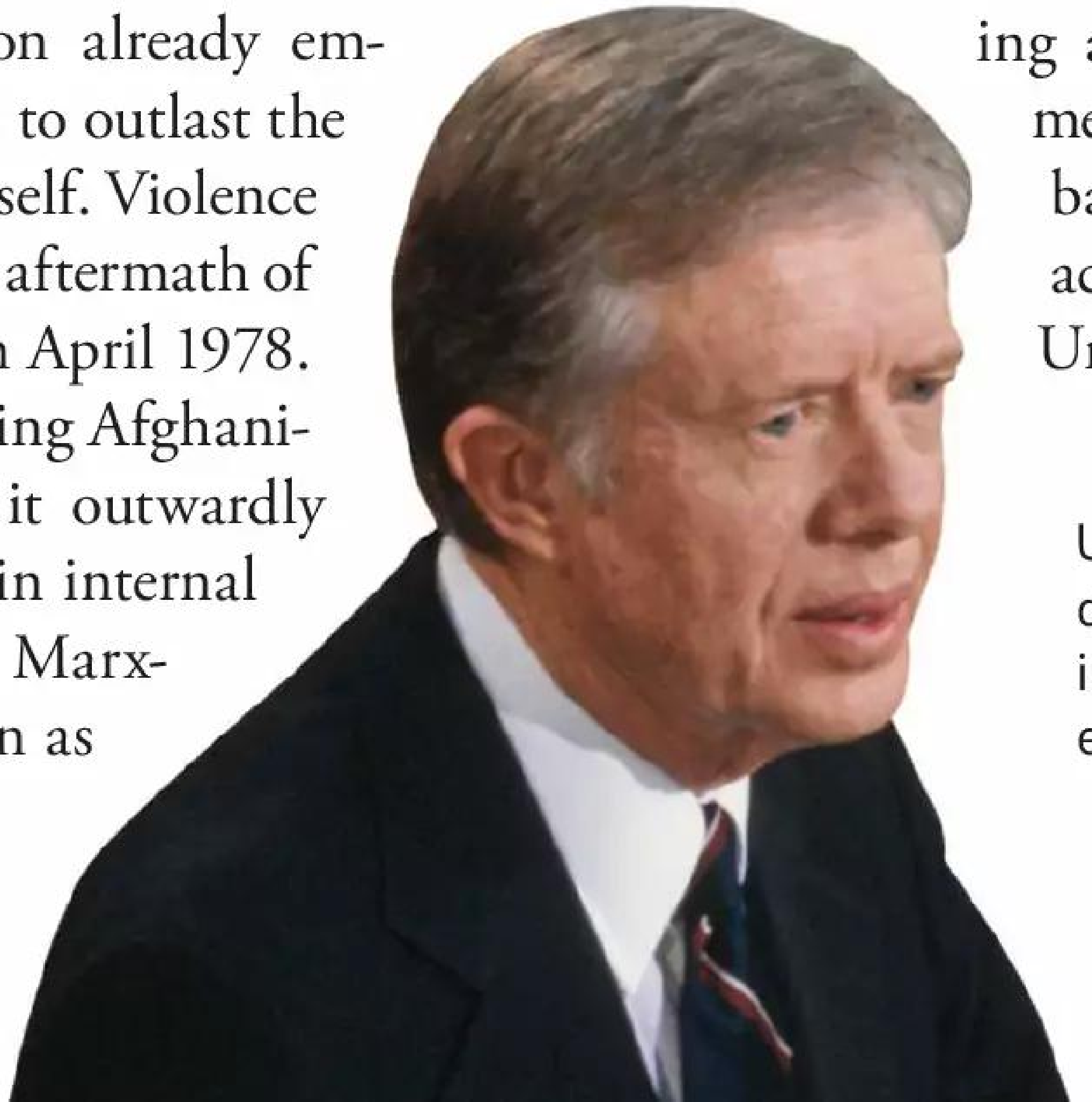
While Vietnam remains the most enduringly remembered of the Cold War's "hot wars", the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had equally explosive consequences – not just for the Cold War superpowers, but for regional relations in south and central Asia, and Afghanistan itself. It signalled the end of détente and a resurgence in Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. It also led to an international outcry, including public condemnation in the UN General Assembly. In 1980, US president Jimmy Carter called for economic sanctions and a boycott of that year's Moscow Olympics, declaring, in his State of the Union address, that "the Soviet Union must pay a concrete price for their aggression".

Existing tensions

Yet this common narrative of Afghanistan in the 1980s – one of Cold War competition and intervention by the so-called "great powers" – tells only a partial story. In this regard, the Islamic Society of Afghanistan's UN petition sheds far greater light on how and why a war would break out that would engulf not just Afghanistan and Afghans, but also regional and international powers alike. Soviet invading forces encountered a nation already embroiled in civil war – one which would go on to outlast the 1980s, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War itself. Violence had broken out more than a year earlier in the aftermath of the coup that brought the PDPA to power in April 1978. The PDPA had formed in the mid-1960s during Afghanistan's era of constitutional reform. While it outwardly pledged to pursue Afghan democratisation, in internal documents the party declared its allegiance to Marxism. Upon splitting into two factions, known as "Khalq" and "Parcham", in 1973 the latter backed former prime minister Mohammad Daoud Khan in overthrowing his cousin, King Mohammed Zahir Shah, and seizing power. After being sidelined under Daoud, however, the two factions reunited and launched an unexpected attack on the government in 1978, which culminated in Daoud's assassination – and gave the PDPA an opportunity to govern. The PDPA pledged itself to a socialist Afghanistan, likening its "Saur Revolution" to Russia's 1917 October Revolution. But the new government's heavy-handed attempts at political, economic and social reform, alongside its willingness to employ violence to enforce its writ, led to local resentment.

By the autumn of 1978, resistance had erupted across Afghanistan's provinces, ranging from Nuristan to Kandahar and from Paktia to Kunar. It only spread from there. By the time Soviet troops invaded, three-quarters of the country was in a state of rebellion. As fighting expanded across the country, a political exodus took place. Individuals and groups labelled enemies of the state by the PDPA sought shelter abroad. A number of political figures settled in and around the city of Peshawar in Pakistan, joining an older coterie of Afghan intellectuals and activists who had fled persecution in earlier times.

While living abroad, these groups sought to mobilise Afghans inside and outside the country against the PDPA. They took a leading role in encouraging and supporting an armed resistance, and some groups went even further, seeking to reshape Afghan politics and society. One of the older groups already active around Peshawar was the Islamic Society of Afghanistan. Originally formed at Kabul University in the mid-1960s, its leaders had fled to Pakistan in the early 1970s after coming into conflict with Afghanistan's then-president: Mohammad Daoud Khan. From exile in 1978, the society's leaders had written to the UN to protest the PDPA's coup and activities. But letter-writing was not the organisation's sole activity. It soon began encouraging armed resistance against the regime, drawing on social and political networks stretching across Afghanistan and Pakistan to deploy men and arms against the PDPA and their Soviet backers. Its members also travelled abroad, across the Middle East and Europe and to the United States, to lobby foreign states for aid. It



US president Jimmy Carter, pictured during a nationwide televised address, in January 1980, in which he called for economic sanctions on the Soviet Union

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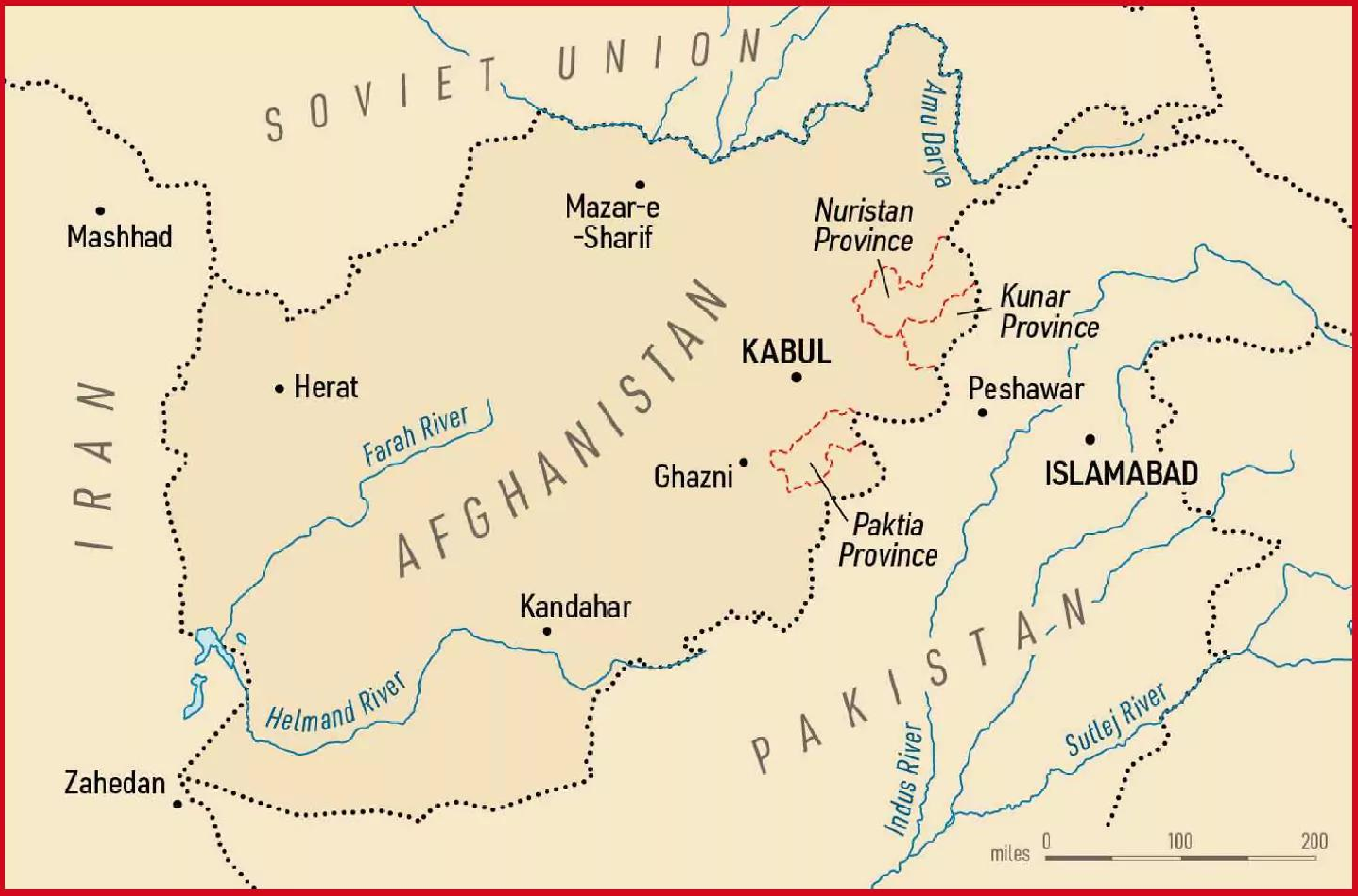
FACTIONAL FIGHTING
Mujahideen rebels in Afghanistan, in the early 1980s. The nation's febrile politics sparked repeated episodes of civil war and infighting during the 1970s and 1980s


SOVIET UNION
Amu Darya
Mashhad
Mazar-e-Sharif
Nuristan Province
Kunar Province
KABUL
Herat
Peshawar
Farah River
AFGHANISTAN
IRAN
Ghazni
ISLAMABAD
Paktia Province
Kandahar
PAKISTAN
Helmand River
Sutlej River
Indus River
Zahedan
miles
0
100
200

GETTY IMAGES/BATTLEFIELD-DESIGN.CO.UK

BATTLE LINES
A map depicting Afghanistan and its neighbours in 1979. In the autumn of 1978, resistance had erupted across the provinces

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published pamphlets to ensure that the world saw the tragedy that was unfolding in Afghanistan, and to promote its own political alternatives. The Islamic Society envisioned a post-conflict Afghanistan in which Islam infused modern politics. It was a vision just as radical as the PDPA's.

Clash of ideologies

The activities of the Islamic Society of Afghanistan, taken alongside those of the PDPA, point to a war that initially had little to do with the Cold War. The conflict that began in Afghanistan in mid-1978 was fundamentally political. It was between competing visions of Afghan politics and society, and of how Afghanistan should be governed, put forward not just by the PDPA and the Islamic Society but also by a variety of other groups. Socialism, Maoism, Islamism, parliamentarianism, monarchism and ethno-federalism were just a few of the alternative systems touted as the PDPA's coup, its failures of governance, and the subsequent outbreak of conflict created an opportunity for different Afghan interest groups to make a play for their visions of Afghanistan to rise to the fore.

Yet regional and Cold War politics fundamentally complicated the conflict, ensuring that none of these Afghan visions ultimately came to pass. Even before the Soviets invaded, they had been involved in Afghanistan. The PDPA's leaders had immediately sought Soviet support and recognition, despite ignoring Soviet suggestions to moderate their policies and seek local allies. The scale of Soviet activities changed after December 1979, but shoring up the Afghan state remained a priority – alongside eliminating any armed resistance. This latter effort largely failed, as the Soviet presence neither increased local support for the PDPA nor succeeded in rooting out insurgents.

From the United States, the Carter administration began providing limited amounts of covert aid in 1979, partially fuelled by concerns of further Soviet spread south-west at a time when Iran was in the throes of revolution and Pakistan's military dictator, Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, had just executed the nation's former civilian leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The initial amount of aid provided was not enough to create a "Soviet Vietnam", as Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, later claimed it could. But this early US support did help establish an aid pipeline that would balloon in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion, as part of subsequent president Ronald Reagan's determination to roll back Soviet influence. Another consequence of this covert aid from the United States was to help further militarise the conflict, although American administrators were indiscriminate about which resistance groups received support.

The war created an opportunity for different Afghan interest groups to make a play for their visions of Afghanistan

In US Cold War calculations, the ability of Afghan resistance groups to produce a military stalemate against superior Soviet firepower mattered far more than local debates about Afghan politics and society. Regional partners took further advantage of Cold War politics. As an ally of the US, and host to many of the Afghan resistance groups in exile, Pakistan was exceptionally placed to manipulate the conflict for its own ends. Not only did its Inter-Services Intelligence take responsibility for distributing foreign aid to Afghan resistance fighters, but the nation's military dictator, General Zia, used this position of influence to shape local and regional politics. He chose to provide particularly strong support to Afghan resistance groups that shared his own interests in the Islamisation of politics, including the Islamic Society and the Islamic Party of Afghanistan (Hizb-i-Islami). This, in turn, narrowed the windows of opportunities for other reform-minded Afghan groups, which received less financial and military aid.

ALAMY

PRIZE OF WAR
A captured Soviet armoured personnel carrier is inspected in eastern Afghanistan, December 1979. The Soviet invasion had explosive consequences both for global and regional politics

TIMELINE

AFGHANISTAN'S AGONY

January 1965

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan forms in the nation's capital, Kabul, against a backdrop of constitutional reform. Groups such as the Islamic Society of Afghanistan also begin organising.

17 July 1973

The king's cousin, **Mohammad Daoud Khan** (pictured right), **launches a coup d'etat**, establishing the Republic of Afghanistan.

27 April 1978

The PDPA launches a coup, killing Daoud and his family, and announces the creation of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The PDPA and the **Soviet Union sign a treaty of friendship** in December.

Crowds gather to see official images of Afghanistan's new rulers, May 1978

15–20 March 1979

A popular uprising against the PDPA takes places in Herat. The PDPA forcibly retakes the city, resulting in between 5,000 and 25,000 civilian deaths.

3 July 1979

US president Jimmy Carter **authorises limited financial support for Afghan resistance groups**, working alongside Pakistan.

24 December 1979

Soviet troops enter Afghanistan, with the Politburo citing the December 1978 treaty of friendship.

A Soviet tank in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush mountains in January 1980, shortly after the invasion

14 January 1980

The UN General Assembly resoundingly passes a resolution demanding the immediate **withdrawal of Soviet troops**.

11 March 1985

Mikhail Gorbachev (pictured right) **comes to power** in the Soviet Union. He begins looking for ways to ensure a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

14 April 1988

UN-negotiated **Geneva Accords are signed**, paving the way for the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

15 February 1989

The final Soviet forces withdraw from Afghanistan. Fighting nevertheless continues, and the United States and Soviet Union continue to provide financial support to combatants.

1990

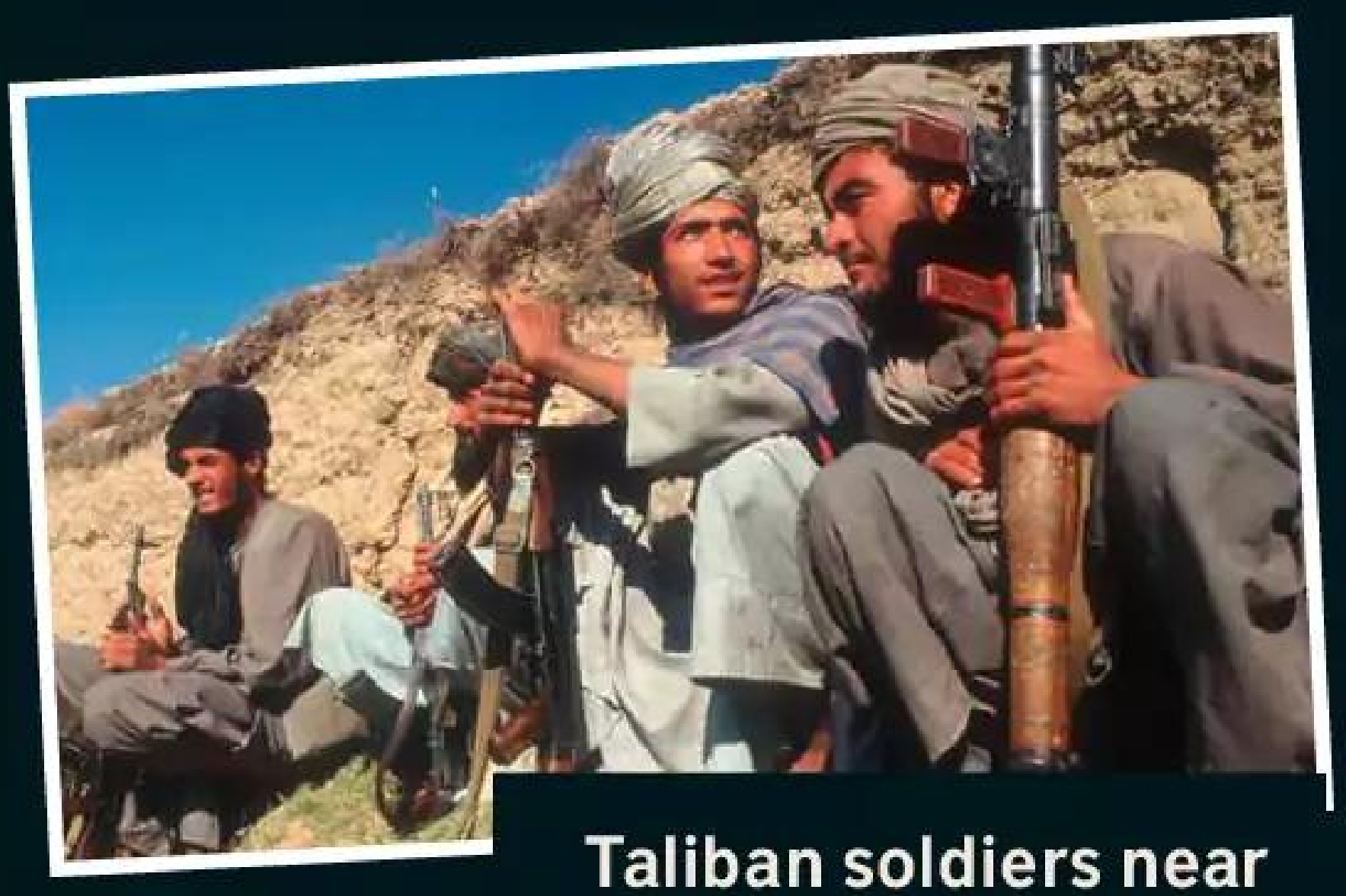
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are at least **6.3 million Afghan refugees worldwide**.

29 April 1992

A new interim government assumes authority in Afghanistan, uniting a coalition of resistance groups. However, infighting continues, preventing the government from being effective.

27 September 1996

The Taliban seizes Kabul, effectively becoming Afghanistan's rulers. Resistance continues in north-eastern Afghanistan, headed by the Northern Alliance.



Taliban soldiers near Bagram Air Base, Kabul, 1996

December 2001

Three months after the 9/11 attacks, the Northern Alliance – with backing from the US and its allies – **topples the Taliban from power**.

February 2020

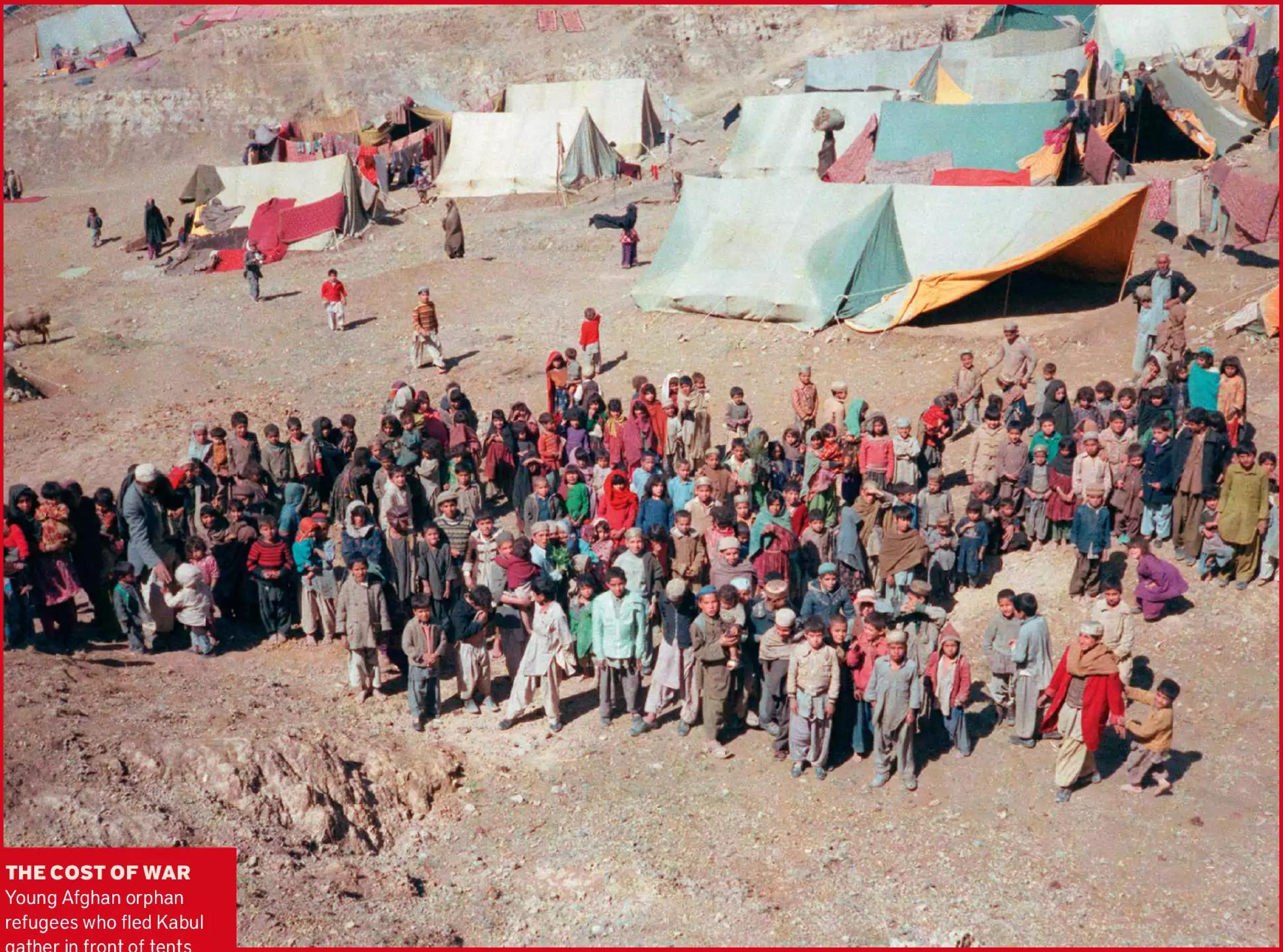
The United States and the Taliban sign the Doha Agreement, in which the US agrees to withdraw its troops before the May of the following year.

May 2021

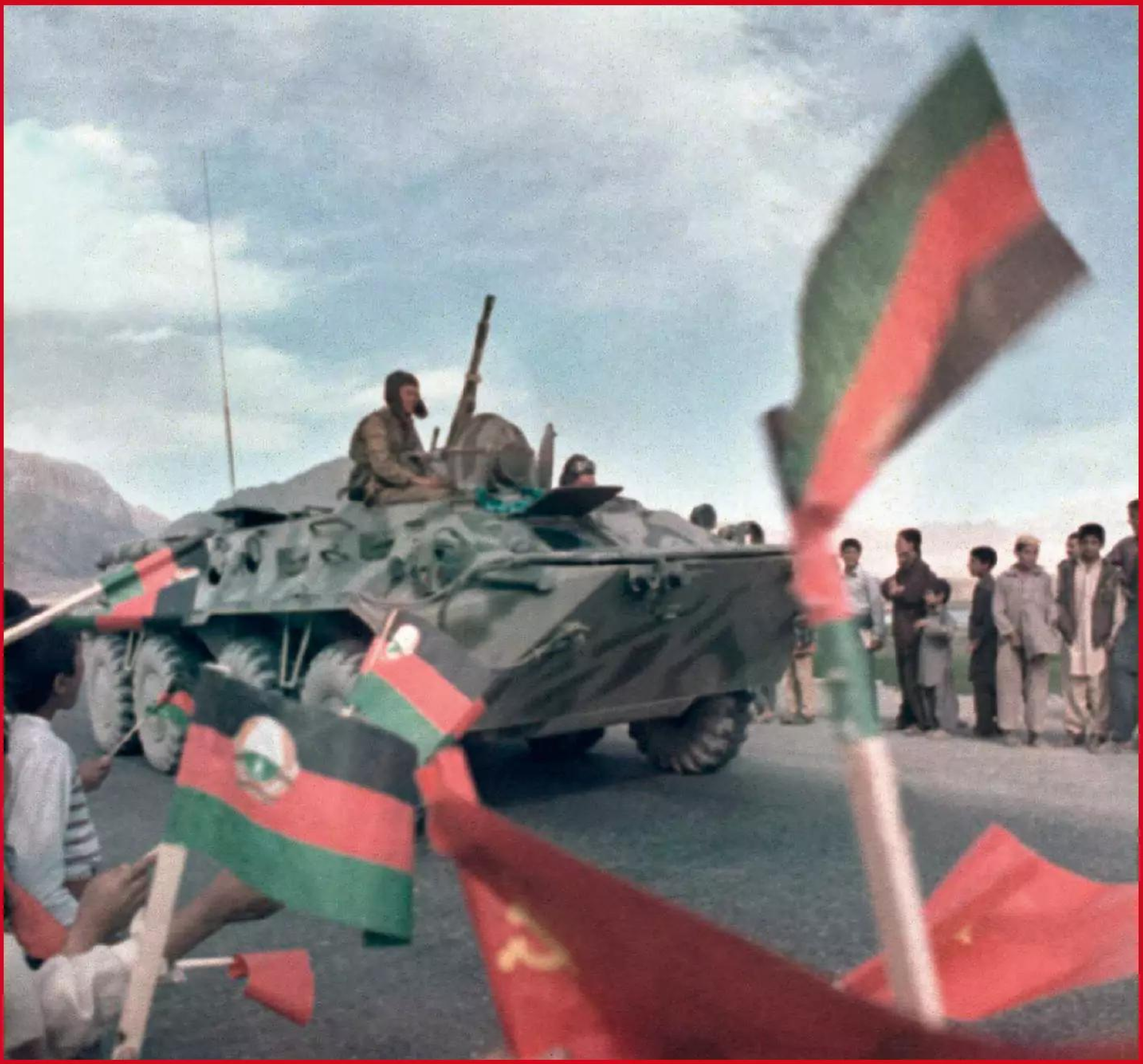
The Taliban launches an offensive against Afghan government forces. It goes on to take Kabul that August. →

Civilians are evacuated from Kabul's airport on 24 August, 2021

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



THE COST OF WAR
Young Afghan orphan refugees who fled Kabul gather in front of tents in the Bajaur refugee camp in Pakistan, on 28 March 1980



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED?
Soviet forces drive by crowds in Kabul as they leave Afghanistan, May 1988. The country's civil war continued long after the withdrawal

GETTY IMAGES

The fact that Zia's government could wield such influence was due in part to a second Afghan exodus. The PDPA coup and subsequent Soviet invasion was accompanied by one of the 20th century's largest refugee crises, as Afghan people fled the spread of the conflict. Some migrated within Afghanistan, while others went abroad. Millions settled in Pakistan and Iran, while tens of thousands more travelled to India, western Europe, and North America.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that almost half of Afghanistan's population was forced on the move due to the war, sparking an international humanitarian crisis. As host to several million Afghan refugees, Pakistan worked with international partners, including the UNHCR and other UN agencies, to house and support this population. But in seeking to ease the administrative burden of managing the refugees, Pakistani officials turned to the same Afghan resistance groups that had been armed and funded to fight the Soviets. Groups including the Islamic Society and Islamic Party became intermediaries between Afghan refugees on one hand, and camp and government administrators on the other. They often demanded party membership in return for access to humanitarian aid, giving them outsized influence among many Afghan exiles.

The coup and subsequent invasion were accompanied by one of the 20th century's largest refugee crises

A cycle of violence

At least five different conflicts thus fit under the guise of the "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan". They include the war over Afghan politics, the global Cold War, and the regional competition for influence over Afghanistan and within south Asia. But they also include the humanitarian struggle over the rights of Afghan civilians and their ability to return home, and the debates in the international community as United Nations members discussed the legality of the Soviet invasion and gave the organisation the mandate to facilitate a negotiated Soviet withdrawal.

The intersections between these conflicts simultaneously expanded and constricted the nature of the war in the 1980s. They created new opportunities for some groups inside and outside Afghanistan but also limited the conflict's outcomes, as well as the nation's political possibilities and place in international politics. Islamist groups came into the spotlight, and for the first time vied seriously to rule a post-conflict Afghanistan.

Their own activities – supporting an armed resistance, interceding for refugees, and lobbying the international community – coalesced with PDPA reforms, which were initially very hostile to Islam. They also benefited from Pakistani favouritism, giving such groups exceptional influence. Increasingly, in the realm of Afghan politics, debates about Afghanistan's future involved discussions about Islam's political, rather than just personal or religious, role.

But such debates did not necessarily reverberate outside of the country. Most notably, the UN-led discussions that ultimately resulted in the Soviet withdrawal of troops by February 1989 involved representatives of only four participants: the US, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and the PDPA. Despite the key role that resistance groups had played in stalling the Soviets and undermining the stability of the PDPA-led state, and the stated sympathies of the international community, members of such groups were excluded. There was little discussion about what a post-conflict Afghanistan should look like, how this might be achieved, or how civil war combatants might reconcile their differences. Consequently, UN negotiations only resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The civil war continued long after the Cold War superpowers lost interest. Fighting between local interest groups persisted in Afghanistan, despite several attempts at creating political coalitions.

Afghan civilians and infrastructures continued to bear the brunt of that war. Many refugees were unable to return home, even as international aid began to slow down. Several towns and villages had been so damaged that they could hardly sustain local livelihoods, while black markets and corruption ran rampant. These developments created the opportunities for the fundamentalist Taliban movement to come to power, taking advantage of the destruction and ongoing infighting. And even then, the violence did not stop.

Many of the dynamics that have developed in Afghanistan in the 21st century can only be understood by looking at this longer history of conflict in the region. But even this perspective is narrow. It focuses all too often on Afghanistan as a site of warfare or intervention, and therefore fails to recognise the alternative forms of politics and society imagined and sought by many Afghan people themselves. The Islamic Society of Afghanistan's letter to the UN reveals an organisation that sought real political and social change and adopted a universally recognised language of rights and world peace. It was not just an insurgent group fighting to push back invading forces: it aimed to create an Afghanistan that adopted tenets of political Islam while engaging with international society. Indeed, it continued to fight in the ongoing civil war, and joined a coalition government in 1992. It was part of the Northern Alliance that continued to combat the Taliban after it came to power, and its members took part in further governing coalitions after 2001. But its earlier political visions never came to pass.

The war, then, must be seen not just through the prism of Cold War alliances or of a desire by all Afghan people to return to existing norms. For some Afghans, it was an effort to create something new. Only by recognising such aspirations – as well as the ways in which they failed to materialise – do the real ramifications of the Soviet invasion become clear. ●

A member of the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in Kabul, 1988, during the Soviet troop withdrawal

GETTY IMAGES

PERSPECTIVES

ONE MOMENT, TWO VIEWPOINTS

The world faces Cold War nuclear disaster

In November 1983, Nato troops embarked on secret war-game exercises in Europe – and paranoid Soviet leaders, convinced of imminent attack, prepared to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike. Here we trace the background and events of the 'Able Archer 83' incident that almost saw a catastrophic eruption of dormant Cold War aggression

BY **TAYLOR DOWNING**

The year 1983 was a supremely dangerous one. Many historians – indeed, probably most people with a knowledge of modern history – view the Cuban missile crisis, the very public US-Soviet confrontation of 1962, as the Cold War's most fraught point. But recently released, long-restricted documents reveal that the crisis of November 1983 saw the Soviet Union come perilously close to pressing the nuclear button.

The 1970s had seen a period of détente between the superpowers, symbolised by the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accords (intended to clarify sovereignty issues and improve relations between eastern Europe and the west) and the rendezvous of the Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft. After decades of mutual suspicion, it seemed that the two superpowers could, after all, enjoy a peaceful co-existence.

But during the early months of 1983, tensions again rose. President Ronald Reagan increased US defence spending at the highest peacetime rate since the Second World War. In March, he called the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and launched his new Strategic Defense Initiative, dubbed the 'Star Wars' programme, which aimed to develop a satellite-linked system to defend the US against attack by ballistic missiles.

In Moscow, this was seen as directly aggressive, because it undermined the principle of mutually assured destruction if either side used nuclear weapons. The paranoid Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, felt threatened. He called the US president a "warmonger", and put the KGB on worldwide alert to watch for signs of an imminent nuclear attack. Tensions were further inflamed when a Korean civilian airliner that had veered off course was shot down over a sensitive Soviet military zone. Reagan called it an "atrocity" committed by a "terrorist state". This was interpreted in the Kremlin as the build-up to a pre-emptive attack by the US, and Soviet media began to warn its people of an imminent nuclear strike.

Then, in early November, Nato started a war-game exercise, codenamed Able Archer 83, to rehearse procedures for the launch of nuclear weapons. Though the Soviets had been informed, it caused panic in Moscow, which believed the exercise was a case of maskirovka, or 'disguise' – a military deception. The Soviet leadership issued orders to ready the nuclear arsenal for war.

→ Over the following pages we explore US and Soviet views of the episode…

WAR GAMES

US Army M60 tanks roll during Nato exercises in Germany in the early 1980s. In November 1983, a Nato war game codenamed Able Archer 83 alarmed paranoid Soviet leaders to the extent that they believed nuclear attack was imminent – and prepared to strike first

→

THE **US** PERSPECTIVE

"Reagan described Soviet leaders as criminals, liars and cheats"

Towards the end of the 1970s, the US right wing began to feel they had been duped – that the Soviets were using the period of détente to build up their weaponry and stir up trouble in the developing world. Ronald Reagan exploited this theme in his campaign for the presidency in 1980 and, after his election, authorised a massive build-up of arms including new bombers, missiles and tanks, along with a dramatic increase in naval power. The Pentagon got almost everything it wanted. Reagan hoped ultimately to negotiate with the Soviets – but only from a position of strength.

Reagan was known for being deeply hostile to communism. As president of the Screen Actors Guild in the late 1940s and 1950s he had fought against what he saw as a communist conspiracy to infiltrate Hollywood. He viewed Marxism-Leninism as an ideology that put the state before the people, and which always used the end to justify any means. In his eyes, the end was nothing less than world domination, and he regularly quoted the words of Soviet leaders, from Lenin to Brezhnev, who had predicted the ultimate victory of world communism. In his first press conference as president, Reagan described Soviet leaders as criminals, liars and cheats, claiming that they hid their real ambitions behind a language of peace and reconciliation. He would not be fooled by them.

Everywhere he looked, Reagan saw the forces of communism advance in a plot orchestrated by the Kremlin. After the humiliation of US withdrawal from the Vietnam War in 1973, that country – along with neighbouring Cambodia and Laos – fell to the communists. In Africa, Cuban-backed guerrillas grew in numbers, and Angola and Mozambique fell to Soviet-backed regimes. Moscow further expanded its influence in Central America with the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979. After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan that year, Reagan came to believe that they also threatened Iran and the Middle East. He thought that unless America took a stand it risked losing the Cold War. Reagan knew that the economy of the United States was fundamentally strong. The 1980s witnessed the birth of a technological revolution that would transform society and create great wealth. This was what Reaganites believed free enterprise was about – enabling individuals to achieve their ambitions. In Reagan's view, the role of government was to provide a lead but then to let the free market bring the best economic outcomes for the largest number of people. He was suspicious of big government, and believed that its role needed to be cut back, especially in areas such as health and welfare provision.

Anti-communist crusade

So Reagan set out his stall: he aimed to defend freedom and democracy, and to lead the free world in a struggle against communism. He saw the conflict between democracy and communism as the battle between right and wrong, good and evil. In March 1983, he described the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil in the modern world".

But neither Reagan nor his security and intelligence advisers had any idea of the impact of their words and deeds on Moscow. Though the CIA had accrued a mass of information about their rival's weapons systems from spies and surveillance, they had no insight into the thinking of the Soviet leaders. They carried on their anti-communist crusade without any sense of the panic they were generating in the Kremlin.

Reagan believed, with the strength of a religious faith, that the Soviet system was deeply flawed – so many resources were allocated to military expenditure, while low priority was given to the manufacture of consumer goods or the welfare of the population. In the Soviet Union, as he saw it, people did not matter and human rights meant nothing, because all efforts were devoted to building the strength of the state.

As the US president said in a speech to the joint Houses of Parliament in London in June 1982, "the constant shrinkage of economic growth, combined with the growth of military production, is putting a heavy strain on the Soviet people". Reagan was confident that the socialist system faced collapse, and that the "march of freedom and democracy" would "leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history". His aim was to bring about this collapse as soon as possible.

In this tense, febrile atmosphere, Nato began the exercise codenamed Able Archer 83. In this communications war game, an imaginary conventional war against Warsaw Pact forces [the Soviet Union and seven satellite states] went wrong, leading Nato commanders to request permission to escalate the conflict and deploy nuclear weapons against a major Soviet Union target. In the war game, permission to use nuclear weapons came on 9 November. By that night the Soviets were convinced this was no exercise but the build-up to a real pre-emptive nuclear strike.

GETTY IMAGES

ATTACKING AN "EVIL EMPIRE"

Ronald Reagan makes a televised address to the United States about Soviet arms in March 1983. Earlier that month he had delivered a speech in Florida decrying "the aggressive impulses of an evil empire", one of many pronouncements reflecting his hostility to communism, and the Soviet Union in particular – an attitude that further strained relations between the two Cold War adversaries

→

THE **SOVIET** PERSPECTIVE

"Always paranoid, Andropov became convinced of imminent nuclear attack"

The situation looked very different from the Kremlin. In the early 1980s, the new US president was seen by the Soviets as aggressive and threatening, hurling out abuse in speech after speech. Soviet leaders were proud men: they presided over a vast country extending from the Arctic to the deserts of Central Asia, and from the border of Europe to the farthest points of east Asia. They controlled a huge nuclear arsenal of tens of thousands of warheads and a military of five million men and women.

To Moscow, the west represented an essentially individualistic, greedy, aggressive ethos. Marxism-Leninism, by contrast, was committed to collective action for the good of everyone. Education and healthcare were free. There was no unemployment, and supposedly no crime. Even if the reality was far from the ideal, they believed that it was a better and fairer system than that of the west.

Leonid Brezhnev had led the Soviet Union for nearly two decades. He wanted peace with the west, while maintaining Soviet authority over the regimes of Eastern Europe. He supported national liberation movements across the developing world, seeing an opportunity for the advance of socialism. He had witnessed the destruction of the Second World War, and was determined to avoid a nuclear confrontation. He believed that the American leadership shared his view that a nuclear exchange would be suicidal. But, as the economies of the west grew dramatically, the Soviet Union under Brezhnev slid into a long period of stagnation. It relied upon central control, with a dependence on heavy, traditional industries. Consumer goods such as cars were rare. Soviet cities teemed with citizens on bicycles and buses. Queuing for even basic goods was endemic. The media were state controlled, and no public expression of discontent was allowed. The only thing that was abundant and cheap was vodka, and its use affected productivity, with millions of days lost each year through absenteeism. Yet despite the economic torpor, Brezhnev accepted stagnation as a form of stability.

When Brezhnev died in November 1982, the Politburo unanimously selected Yuri Andropov as leader. He was a hardliner who had led the Committee for State Security – the KGB – for 15 years and had the full support of the military. He would introduce economic reforms, but would only tinker at the edges.

Andropov believed that Reagan's aggression was a prelude to a surprise attack. KGB agents started to find evidence that caused growing concern in Moscow. After a truck bomb in Beirut killed 241 marines and sailors, the US military put its bases worldwide onto a state of high alert. This was interpreted by the KGB as clear evidence an attack was being prepared. So when Nato began a war game that included practising the launch of nuclear weapons, Andropov was convinced that this was a deception. After all, the Soviet Union had itself developed plans to attack the west under the guise of military exercises.

By November 1983, Andropov was suffering from kidney disease. No doubt his physical illness did not help his mental condition. Always paranoid, he became convinced that a nuclear attack was imminent. He knew that if American missiles were launched on Moscow he'd have only minutes to respond. Then, on 9 November, Nato began to use an unknown code – apparently to launch its missiles. The Kremlin was convinced this was no exercise but the real thing. The entire Soviet nuclear arsenal was put onto maximum combat alert. Huge SS-19 missiles were readied; submarines armed with nuclear weapons were deployed; mobile SS-20s were sent to launch positions hidden in the Russian countryside; aircraft in Poland and East Germany were put on strip alert with their engines on.

But there was no Nato attack. Able Archer was a war game, and no more. The Soviets kept their nuclear forces on high alert for some weeks, but the moment of maximum danger had passed.

Aftermath of the incident

On 11 November, the Nato exercise ended – and Soviet fears abated. The nuclear arsenal was then stood down.

When Reagan heard of the scare, he was astonished that the Soviet leadership could believe he would actually launch a nuclear attack against them. He decided to adopt a more conciliatory tone, and in his re-election campaign in 1984 he softened his anti-communist rhetoric. Moreover, when Mikhail Gorbachev – a new, younger Soviet leader – was appointed, he decided he must meet him face to face to ensure that no misunderstanding on this scale could arise again. Subsequent US-Soviet summits in Geneva, Reykjavík, Washington and Moscow opened a dialogue that helped bring an end to longstanding tensions. The terrifying scare of November 1983 proved to be the last paroxysm of the Cold War. ●

AGEING AUTOCRAT
Soviet premier Yuri Andropov, a Communist Party hardliner and former KGB chief, pictured in May 1983. By November, when the Nato Able Archer 83 war game began, he was suffering from kidney disease, running his country from a clinic outside Moscow – a situation that surely exacerbated his pre-existing paranoia about the United States. On hearing about Able Archer, he believed his fears of a pre-emptive strike were well founded

PREPARING FOR ARMAGEDDON

In the 1980s, as Britons' fear of a nuclear war escalated, the government issued a raft of guidance on how to survive the apocalypse. But if ministers expected a grateful nation to embrace their advice, they were in for a shock

BY **TARAS YOUNG**

Kellogg's
CORN
Carr's

GETTY IMAGES

In 1983, in the middle of a very ordinary London housing estate, a van driver called Ben Hayden unloaded his shopping from Sainsbury's and started building his own fallout shelter. As he did so, Armageddon seemed closer than ever. Following the relatively peaceful period of detente in the 1970s, during which diplomatic relations between east and west eased, tensions had again been stirred up by revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Western politics had shifted to the right, with Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in the UK being quickly followed by the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in the US. The pressure was rising to a point that hadn't been felt since the Cuban missile crisis two decades earlier; for an anxious British public, nuclear confrontation seemed almost inevitable.

When the government announced, in 1980, that the US would deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles on UK soil, the British public's nuclear worries were brought to a head. "What pushed it to the front of people's concerns was the plan to install short-range missiles at Greenham Common and Molesworth, and the big demonstrations that the decision provoked," says Philip Steadman, emeritus professor of Urban and Built Form Studies at UCL. "That made the issue more immediate and personal. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament became the bogeyman of the right, and there was an acrimonious and nervous political atmosphere."

Ian Sanders, who hosts the Cold War Conversations podcast, says the threat of nuclear war loomed large in the public consciousness. "It definitely felt like nuclear war could break out at any time, either by accident or design. As someone in my early twenties, with a life to live, it really did feel as though the end of the world could happen any moment."

A little consumer test

To help prepare the people of Britain for a potential nuclear attack, in 1981 the UK Home Office published *Domestic Nuclear Shelters*. Available for just 50 pence, this slim pamphlet aimed to advise the masses on building their own fallout shelters. It gave basic guidance on constructing a hideaway where you could live for up to two weeks after nuclear attack, avoiding – hopefully – the worst of the radiation.

Hayden, a member of Tower Hamlets CND, decided to put this advice to the test in the most practical way possible. Following the instructions to the letter, he would perform what local punk poet Alan Gilbey wryly described as a "little consumer test", putting up a fallout shelter in his housing estate and living there for two weeks. For Hayden, though, this was a sombre undertaking. "I'm building this seriously," he told a local reporter. "When this shelter is completed, it'll prove to everyone what a farce the arrangements for surviving after the bomb are."

NESCAFE
PINEAPPLE
norm

LAST LINE OF DEFENCE
A woman takes a seat in a government-approved shelter in York, January 1981. Unlike some countries, Britain placed the onus on individuals to find their own means of protecting themselves in the event of a nuclear war, writes Taras Young

→

Hayden stocked the shelter with everything the government recommended, plus a few home comforts: plenty of tins of food, a bag of clean clothes, two water tanks, waste buckets, books, a sleeping bag, a pillow, a guitar, and his diary. Crawling into his makeshift home late on a Monday afternoon, he was upbeat as he adjusted to life in this cramped new world. On that first day, he wasn't alone: journalists did their best to clamber into the shelter to conduct interviews; he heard people from the local estate talking about him (one opined that he must be a "nutter"); and local children gave him a fright by shouting down the ventilation shaft, their voices amplified in the enclosed, tube-like space below.

Soon, Hayden was questioning his own sanity. Four days in, he started to lose track of time, and there wasn't enough clean air in the shelter to sustain a candle. "This place really begins to get on top of me," he told his diary. "I get a slight feeling of claustrophobia, and I take a deep breath of smelly, stale air, and think to myself: 'That's better.'" As the second week began, the toilet waste he had collected had started to decay, causing the waste bags to leak. His urine bucket was full after 10 days; the food tins began to grow mouldy, and an infestation of insects had joined him in the shelter. "I'm reaching the end of my humour... I have no ability to concentrate on anything now; and spend my time just lying here feeling like a shit bag," he wrote.

Beautiful mud

Happily, his two-week stint in the fallout shelter came to an end, and Hayden emerged into the sunlight. Walking out proved difficult – it was the first time he'd stood up in two weeks, after all – but he found he was not alone: as well as a delegation from the press and three television crews, around 200 local people had arrived to greet him. In the playground of a nearby primary school, children watched and cheered. "It was pissing down with rain, there was mud everywhere, and it was beautiful," he wrote.

Spending two weeks in a makeshift nuclear bunker had been gruelling. But, while it had taken a psychological toll, Hayden was under no illusion that the experience had prepared him for the real thing. "The exercise has given me little or no insight into how I might cope," he wrote. "To make more than a superficial comparison would be naive in the extreme… I was not alone. People came and talked and joked – and I looked forward to seeing them again. I knew I would."

What the bunker experiment showed was that the advice presented by the government's *Domestic Nuclear Shelters* pamphlet only seemed practical on the surface. Hayden had found it tough, and he had had all the advantages of building it in peacetime. With no geopolitical crisis, there was the luxury of time: the shelter took a week to construct and provision. Building materials were readily available; he had the money to buy them, and a plot of land to build on. And there was no nuclear attack to withstand; no blast to damage the outside of the bunker; no radioactive fallout to clog the ventilation pipes and his lungs; no confused and agitated survivors seeking food and shelter. His experience led him to be dismissive of the government's advice. "This shelter shows it up to be entirely unrealistic," he told a local reporter. "But I don't think it'll change anything."

"This thing is phoney," said Labour MP Emrys Hughes. "Put it in the waste paper basket!"

And perhaps one reason why the government's advice was so 'unrealistic' was the fact that much of their guidance had not progressed beyond instructions that were created in the midst of the Second World War. During this conflict, the government had issued pamphlets not only on safety during air raids, but on how to best prepare homes for attack. This included guidance on the construction of Anderson shelters – essentially curved corrugated steel tubes, usually buried outside – and Morrison shelters: cheap metal tables with mesh sides, to be used indoors. These could be effective against Luftwaffe raids, but the end of the war brought with it a new threat: the atomic bomb.

Initial public information on the bomb assumed an air of the Blitz spirit: "At Nagasaki, nearly seven out of ten people within a mile from the bomb lived to tell their experiences," claimed a 1952 pamphlet. "Shelters of the last war standard would give good protection against [an] atomic blast." But, as both sides in the Cold War tested and refined the hydrogen bomb, with its mind-bogglingly destructive power, the magnitude of the threat really began to worry the British government.

Individual responsibility

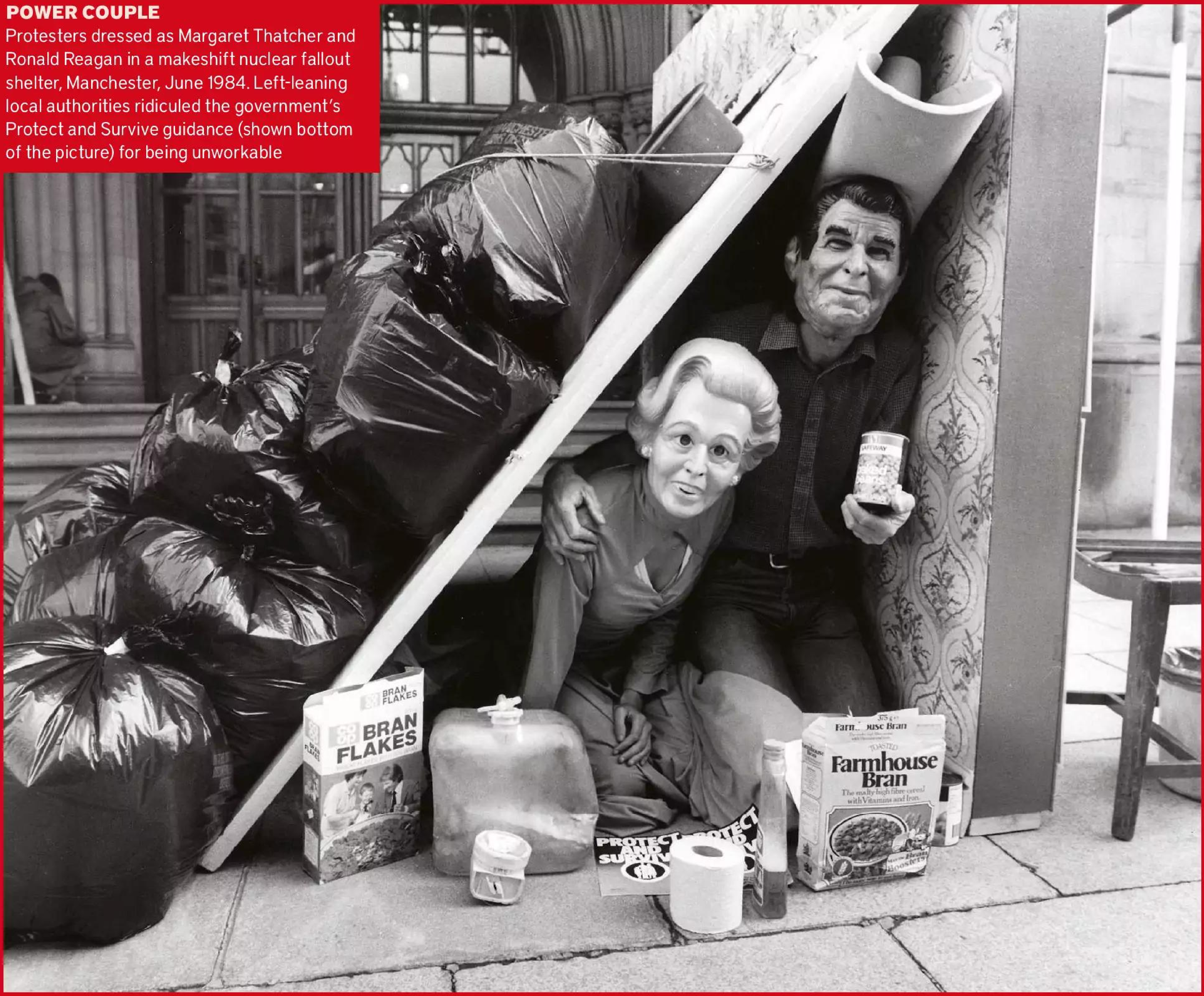
Unlike some countries, however, Britain chose not to make provisions for costly communal fallout shelters as part of its civil defence plans. The onus was instead placed on individuals to find their own means of protecting themselves and their families. This was reflected in detailed public information booklets on the nuclear menace, prepared by the Home Office. The first of these, 1957's *The Hydrogen Bomb*, sought to explain this new kind of weapon to the public; however, beyond a few basic diagrams, it gave no useful advice on how to protect yourself from its effects. Its 1963 follow-up, *Advising the Householder on Protection Against Nuclear Attack*, included a few practical measures on creating a fallout refuge, such as staying in a room in the centre of your home, blocking up windows with sandbags and heavy furniture, or hiding in a trench outside, "deep enough to provide comfortable standing room".

Advising the Householder on Protection Against Nuclear Attack was roundly criticised. It was lambasted by members

In 1983, van driver Ben Hayden spent two gruelling weeks living in a self-built shelter, experiencing an infestation of insects, leaking waste bags and mouldy tinned food

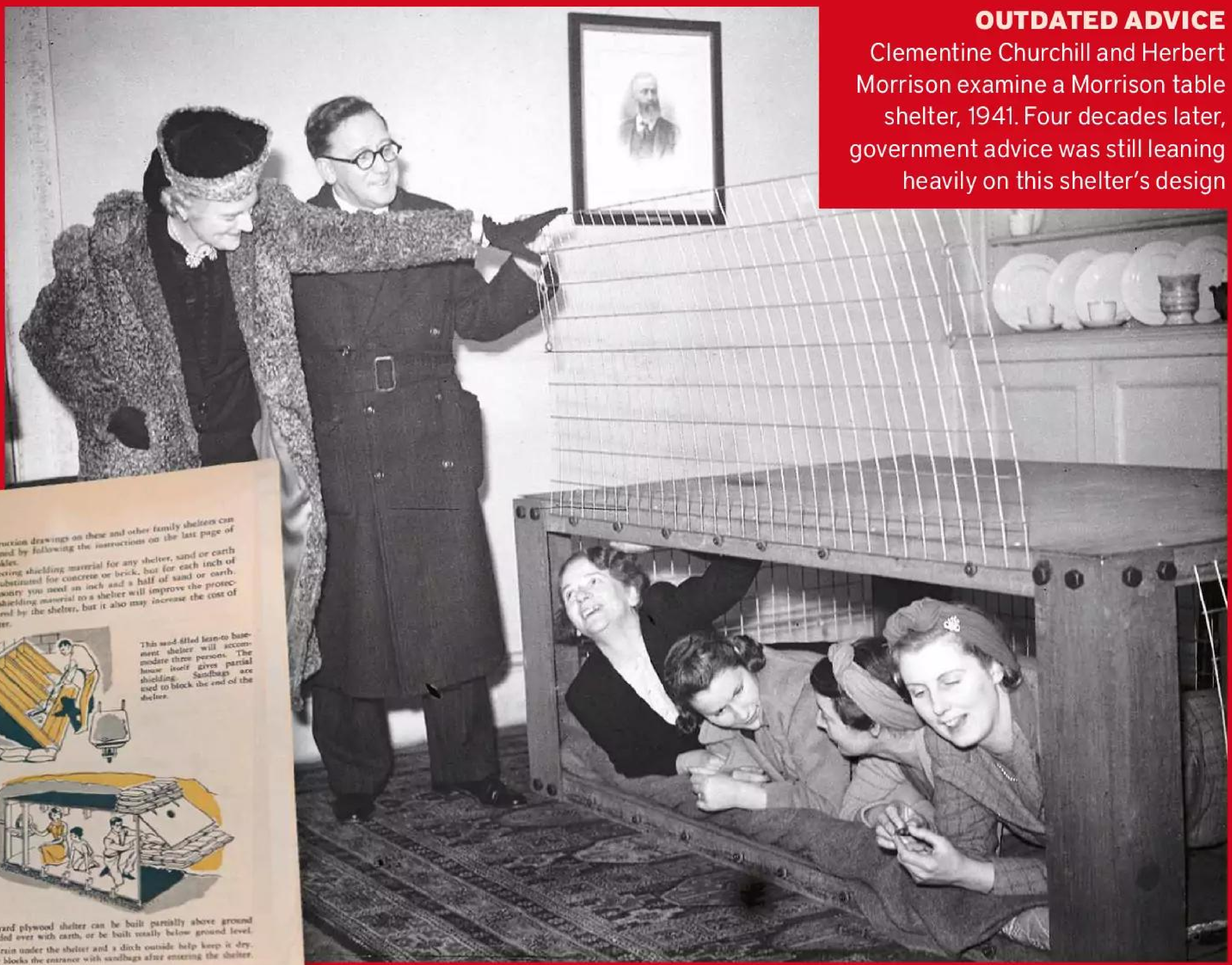
GETTY IMAGES

POWER COUPLE
Protesters dressed as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in a makeshift nuclear fallout shelter, Manchester, June 1984. Left-leaning local authorities ridiculed the government's Protect and Survive guidance (shown bottom of the picture) for being unworkable

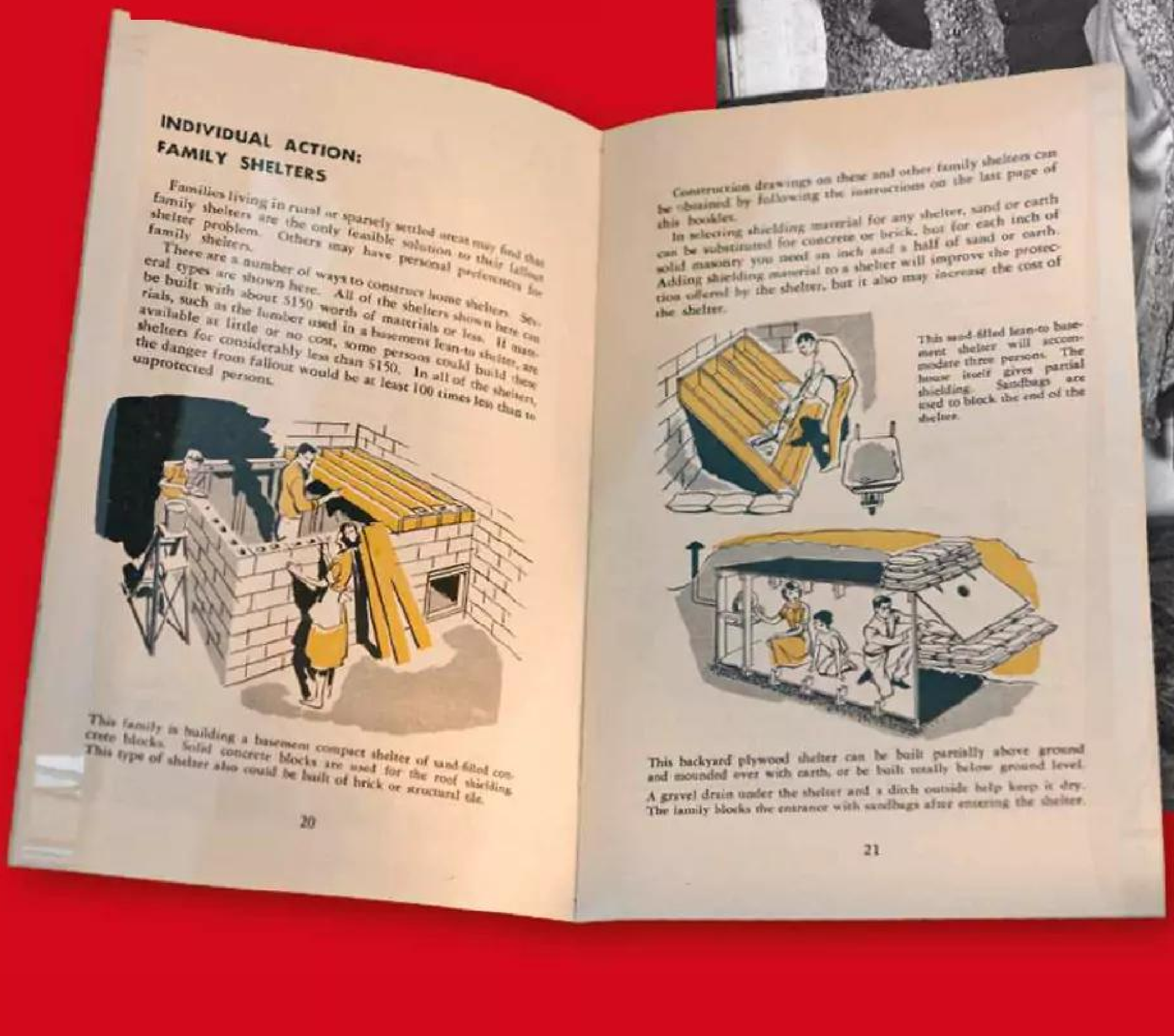


ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

OUTDATED ADVICE
Clementine Churchill and Herbert Morrison examine a Morrison table shelter, 1941. Four decades later, government advice was still leaning heavily on this shelter's design



DIY BOMB SHELTER
Pages from *Fallout Protection: What To Know And Do About Nuclear Attack*, a booklet issued by the US Department of Defence in 1961



INDIVIDUAL ACTION:
FAMILY SHELTERS

Families living in rural or sparsely settled areas may find that family shelters are the only feasible solution to their fallout shelter problem. Others may have personal preferences for family shelters.

There are a number of ways to construct home shelters. Several types are shown here. All of the shelters shown here can be built with about $150 worth of materials or less. If materials, such as the lumber used in a basement lean-to shelter, are available at little or no cost, some persons could build these shelters for considerably less than $150. In all of the shelters, the danger from fallout would be at least 100 times less than to unprotected persons.

This family is building a basement compact shelter of sand-filled concrete blocks. Solid concrete blocks are used for the roof shielding. This type of shelter also could be built of brick or structural tile.

20

Construction drawings on these and other family shelters can be obtained by following the instructions on the last page of this booklet.

In selecting shielding material for any shelter, sand or earth can be substituted for concrete or brick, but for each inch of solid masonry you need an inch and a half of sand or earth. Adding shielding material to a shelter will improve the protection offered by the shelter, but it also may increase the cost of the shelter.

This sand-filled lean-to basement shelter will accommodate three persons. The house itself gives partial shielding. Sandbags are used to block the end of the shelter.

This backyard plywood shelter can be built partially above ground and mounded over with earth, or be built totally below ground level. A gravel drain under the shelter and a ditch outside help keep it dry. The family blocks the entrance with sandbags after entering the shelter.

21

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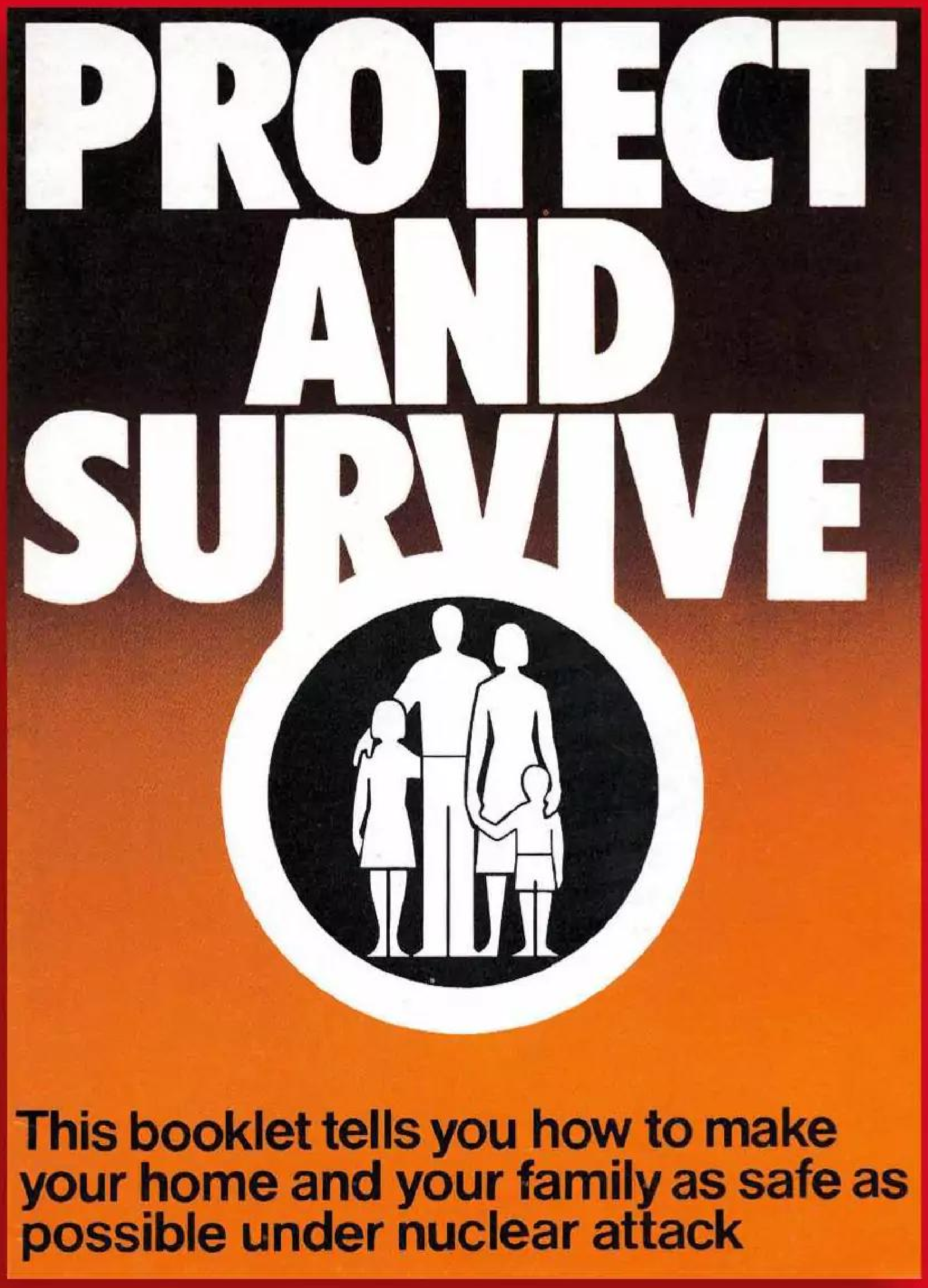
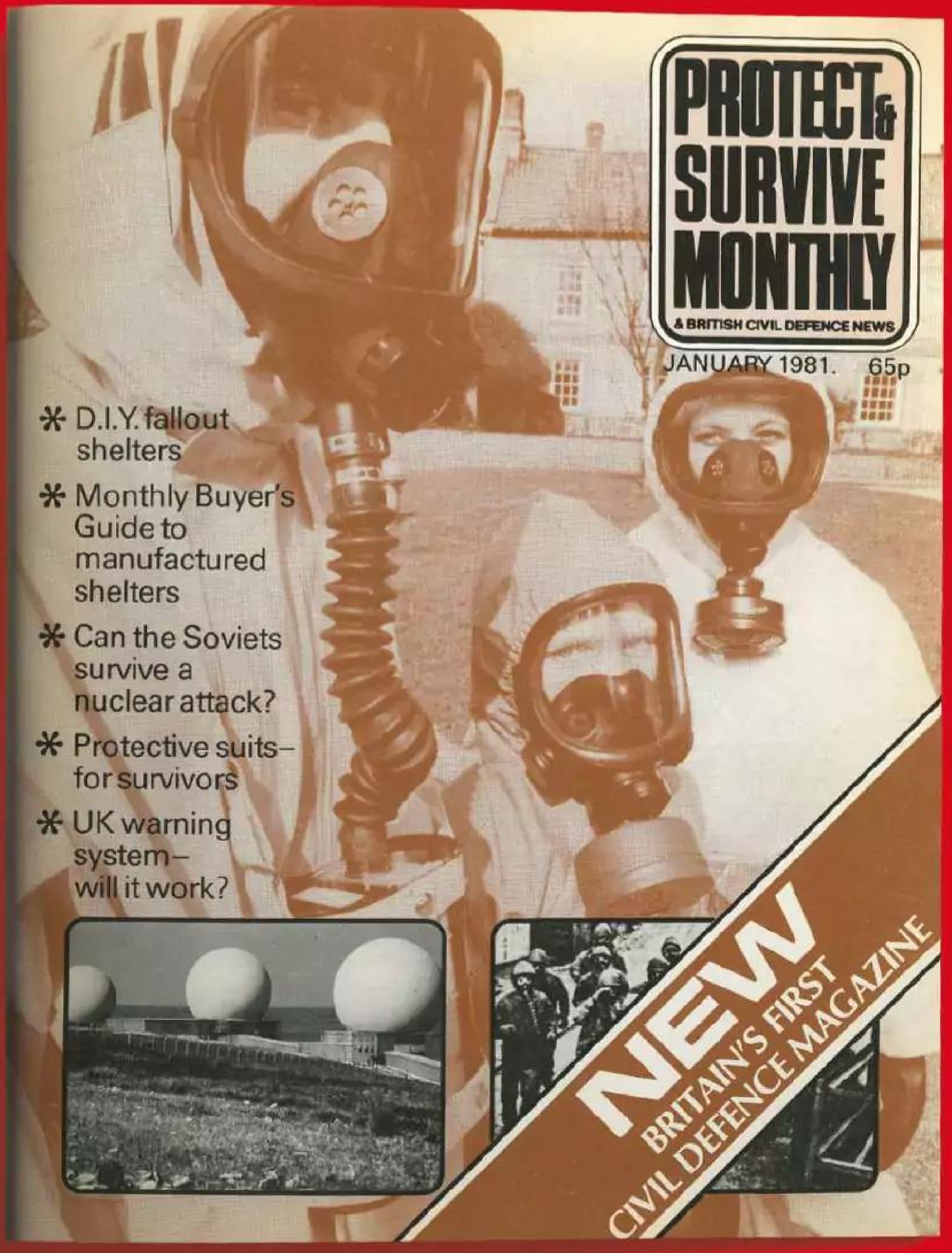

PROTECT
AND
SURVIVE
This booklet tells you how to make your home and your family as safe as possible under nuclear attack


PROTECT & SURVIVE MONTHLY
& BRITISH CIVIL DEFENCE NEWS
JANUARY 1981. 65p
* D.I.Y. fallout shelters
* Monthly Buyer's Guide to manufactured shelters
* Can the Soviets survive a nuclear attack?
* Protective suits– for survivors
* UK warning system– will it work?
NEW
BRITAIN'S FIRST CIVIL DEFENCE MAGAZINE

SYMBOL OF FUTILITY
The Protect and Survive campaign (top) is now regarded as a symbol of the futility of government guidance. But, as *Protect and Survive Monthly* (bottom) proved, there was a market for magazines offering advice on how to prepare for Armageddon

ALAMY

of the public, lampooned on the BBC's satirical programme *That Was the Week that Was*, and even derided by the majority-Conservative Estimates Committee, who complained it gave the public "entirely the wrong impression". In parliament, Labour MP Emrys Hughes condemned the booklet for providing impractical advice, and gave his own summary of the Estimates Committee's position: "This thing is phoney; this thing is rubbish; put it in the waste paper basket!"

Fire and fallout

Following this debacle, new official advice about nuclear attack was slow to materialise. In November 1974, during Harold Wilson's Labour government, Home Office officials came together to discuss the replacement of the unloved, and by now deeply outdated, 1963 guide. This led to the creation of a new public information campaign that was to become even more infamous than its predecessor: 'Protect and Survive'.

Having learned from bitter experience, the Home Office was at pains to ensure that Protect and Survive – which comprised a series of TV and radio spots, as well as an accompanying booklet – would not gain adverse public attention. To that end, they opted to keep the programme under wraps until it was needed: only a small batch of booklets was printed in 1976 and distributed privately to those involved in emergency planning, such as chief executives of local authorities and chiefs of police.

Rendered in brown and orange, the cover of the Protect and Survive booklet evoked fire and fallout, with a nuclear family – father, mother, son and daughter – enclosed in a protective circle at its centre. Inside, though, the advice was remarkably similar to that of previous decades: know the warning signals, stay at home, construct an 'inner refuge', and ensure adequate water and supplies.

It wasn't until the spring of 1980, when investigations by *The Times* and the BBC's *Panorama* exposed the deficiencies of the British civil defence programme, that Protect and Survive came to prominence. The Thatcher administration, newly in power, found their hand forced by public and media demand. They gave the go-ahead for the booklet, with a few tactful changes, to be reprinted and put on sale.

Alongside Protect and Survive, a working group had been established to design and test fallout shelter designs. The outcome of their work, published in early 1981, was *Domestic Nuclear Shelters*. A pamphlet branded with the Protect and Survive logo, containing a potted version of the earlier booklet's advice, it also gave DIY instructions for five types of fallout shelter. Two of these were unquestionably based directly on the Morrison and Anderson shelters designed in the Second World War. In fact, a larger, more detailed technical manual on shelter construction, which the working group developed for tradesmen and engineers, contained step-by-step instructions lifted directly – illustrations and all – from a 1942 guide to erecting a Morrison shelter. The most notable change was the removal of the pipe that one of the figures in the earlier guide had been shown smoking.

The last-minute amendments to Protect and Survive weren't enough to save it, and *Domestic Nuclear Shelters*, from ridicule. The campaign was a gift for leftwing local authorities, who viewed the idea of civil defence as unworkable and actively resisted central government's attempts to shoulder them with the responsibility of managing the public in the aftermath of nuclear attack. The Greater London Council called the government's booklets "quite daft", while an episode of the hugely popular sitcom *Only Fools and*

Horses, screened in 1981, played up the obvious inadequacies of the plans by having the flat-dwelling Trotter family construct a nuclear shelter on the roof of Nelson Mandela House, their central London tower block.

For academic Philip Steadman, the *Domestic Nuclear Shelters* booklet offered a useful way to interrogate the government's planning assumptions for nuclear attack. "I got involved in various teach-ins and demonstrations, and thought to myself: 'What can I do to help?'" he says. "I imagined that, being an architect, I might be able to say something about shelters, so I got hold of the *Domestic Nuclear Shelters* manual. I think it must have been there that I saw the Home Office estimates of blast damage. It immediately struck me that the calculations of areas of land affected couldn't be right."

Digging into the figures, Steadman discovered that the numbers the Home Office had come up with were wildly inaccurate. While *Domestic Nuclear Shelters* claimed that 5 per cent of the UK's land area would suffer the serious effects of a nuclear blast, Steadman found at least 60 per cent of the population would be affected. He published his findings in *New Scientist*, which called the government's figures "highly suspect".

Not everyone was critical, though, and some took the government's advice at face value. Magazines such as *Protect and Survive Monthly* were ready to cater to their needs. Launched in January 1981, with a foreword by Leon Brittan, the minister responsible for civil defence, the magazine was a one-stop shop for the paranoid consumer. Early articles focused largely on shelter construction, but also covered the effects of radiation on agriculture, practical first aid, and even a guide to creating your own DIY fallout suit.

Around them was a plethora of advertisements for pre-built fallout shelters, offering peace of mind – at a price. The government had encouraged the mainstream press not to run advertisements for such products, but readers of *PSM* had their choice of dozens, with names like 'The SURVIVA' and 'FIBA-MOLE'. One advertisement even subverted memories of the Blitz spirit, showing an archive photo of smiling Londoners sheltering in a tube station, with the chilling caption: "Next time, it won't be so easy to hide." For those who couldn't afford to build or buy protection, there was also the option of hiding in the natural fallout shelter provided by Britain's disused metal mines.

Largely focusing on shelter construction, *Protect and Survive Monthly* was a one-stop shop for the paranoid consumer

Today, despite relations between east and west becoming frostier once more, the nuclear threat is still not at the forefront of most people's minds. Yet nuclear weapons have not gone away, and their presence – combined with new risks driven by climate change – means that the Doomsday Clock is as close to midnight now as it has ever been. In an age of instant communication, social media and fake news, it's unlikely that government advice of the kind seen during the Cold War will ever make a comeback. Hopefully, government communicators can learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. ●

RIPE FOR RIDICULE
Rodney and Del Boy in their self-assembled nuclear shelter on the roof of Nelson Mandela House, in an episode of *Only Fools and Horses* from 1981

BBC

THE NUCLEAR 1980s

The prospect of Armageddon cast a long shadow over novelists, film-makers, song-writers and comedians in the first half of the 1980s. Here we present eight cultural responses to Britons' fixation with nuclear war as the Cold War grew more frosty

BY **JONATHAN HOGG**

THE CULTURE OF WAR
The threat of nuclear war caused countless sleepless nights in the 1980s, but it also inspired a remarkable flowering of culture

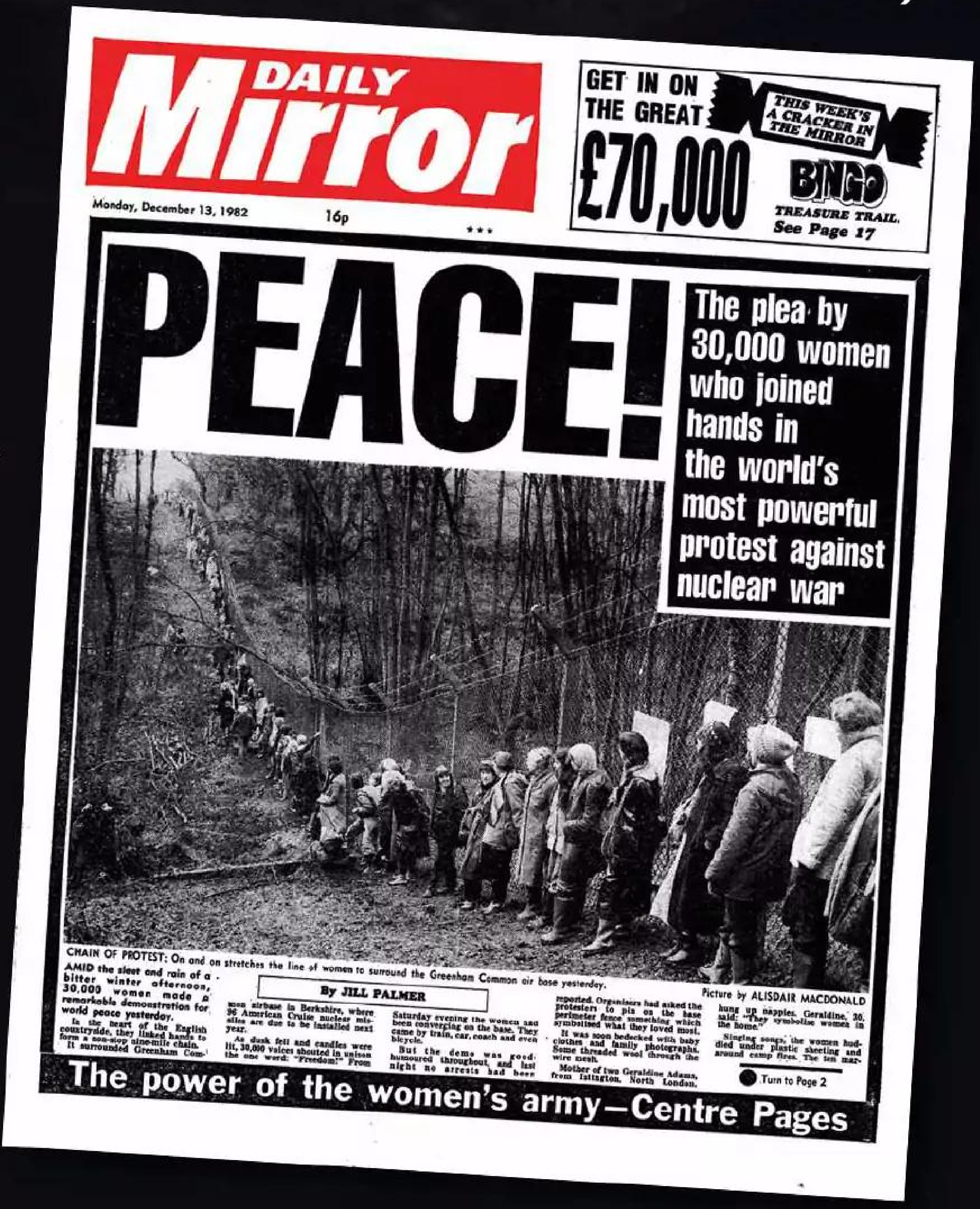
MIRROR IMAGE

1 As nuclear tensions soared, a series of massive protests at Greenham Common made front-page news

A new and potentially ruinous nuclear arms race was firmly back on the international agenda at the dawn of the 1980s. This was the decade of Ronald Reagan's "evil empire" speech about the Soviet Union, of America's 'star wars' defence project, and of Olympic boycotts. It was also the decade in which US Cruise missiles were stationed at Greenham Common in Berkshire.

By the early 1980s, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had amassed more than 100,000 members, and peace camps had sprung up near military bases such as Faslane in Argyll and Bute, and Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire. But, in terms of size, none rivalled the women's peace camp at Greenham Common.

The first blockade here took place in May 1982 with 250 women protesting. By the end of the year, that number had swollen to 30,000, with the women linking hands around the nine miles of fencing that made up Greenham Common's perimeter. They also pinned baby clothes and nappies to the fence to symbolise what they loved most. The sheer size of the camp guaranteed it huge media coverage – as this *Daily Mirror* front page from 13 December 1982, which described the protests as "good-humoured" and "remarkable", testifies.



DAILY Mirror

GET IN ON THE GREAT £70,000 BINGO
THIS WEEK'S A CRACKER IN THE MIRROR
TREASURE TRAIL. See Page 17

Monday, December 13, 1982 16p ★★★

PEACE!

The plea by 30,000 women who joined hands in the world's most powerful protest against nuclear war

CHAIN OF PROTEST: On and on stretches the line of women to surround the Greenham Common air base yesterday.

Picture by ALISDAIR MACDONALD

By JILL PALMER

AMID the sleet and rain of a bitter winter afternoon, 30,000 women made a remarkable demonstration for world peace yesterday.

In the heart of the English countryside, they linked hands to form a non-stop nine-mile chain.

It surrounded Greenham Common airbase in Berkshire, where 96 American Cruise nuclear missiles are due to be installed next year.

As dusk fell and candles were lit, 30,000 voices shouted in unison the one word: "Freedom!" From Saturday evening the women had been converging on the base. They came by train, car, coach and even bicycle.

But the demo was good-humoured throughout, and last night no arrests had been reported. Organisers had asked the protesters to pin on the base perimeter fence something which symbolised what they loved most.

It was soon bedecked with baby clothes and family photographs. Some threaded wool through the wire mesh.

Mother of two Geraldine Adams, from Islington, North London, hung up nappies. Geraldine, 30, said: "They symbolise women in the home."

Singing songs, the women huddled under plastic sheeting and around camp fires. The ten mar-

● Turn to Page 2

The power of the women's army—Centre Pages

The *Daily Mirror* hails the "power of the women's army" at Greenham Common in December 1982

GETTY IMAGES/ MIRRORPIX/FOTOLIBRA

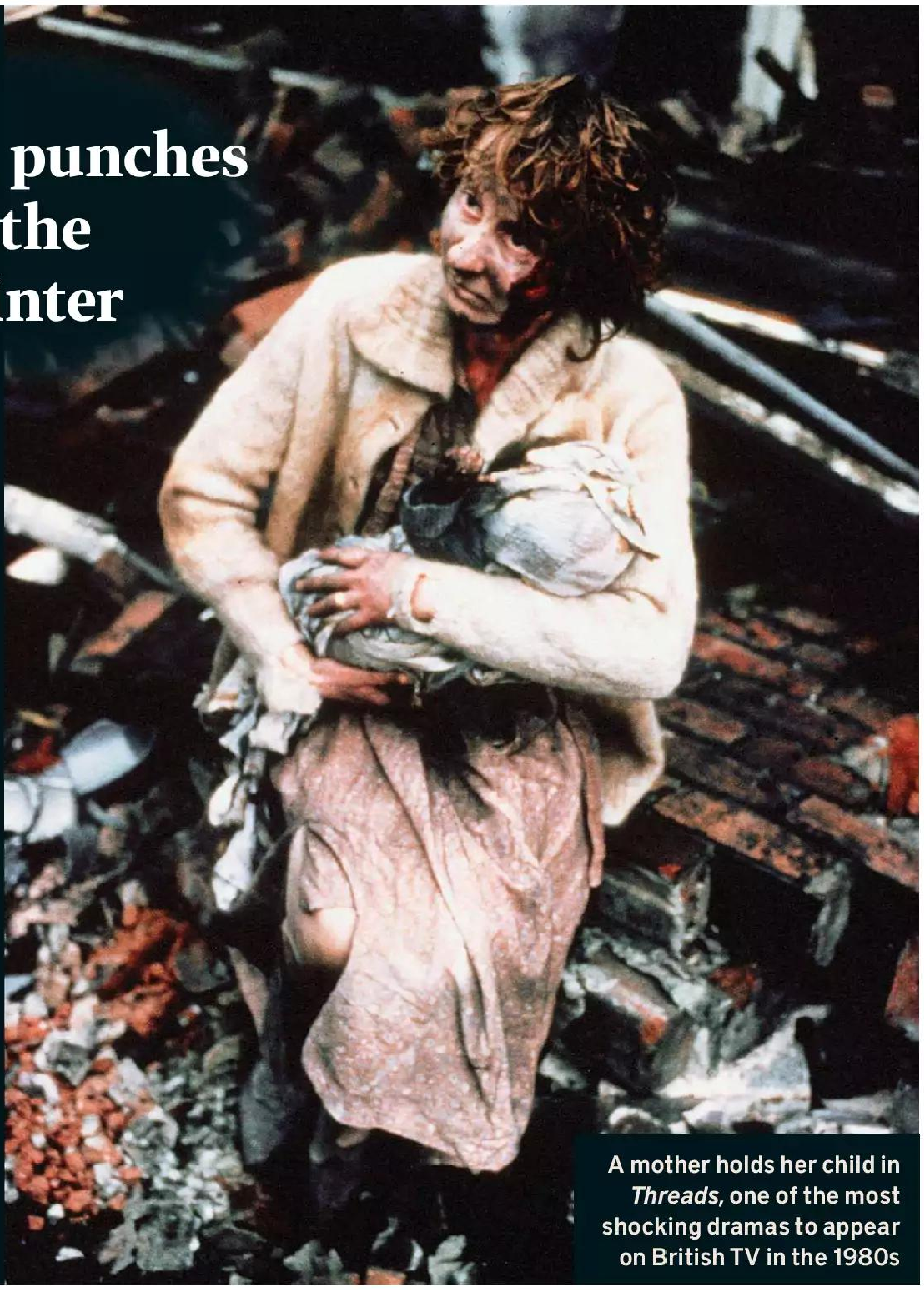
NIGHTMARE SCENARIO

2 *Threads* pulled no punches in its depiction of the horrors of a nuclear winter

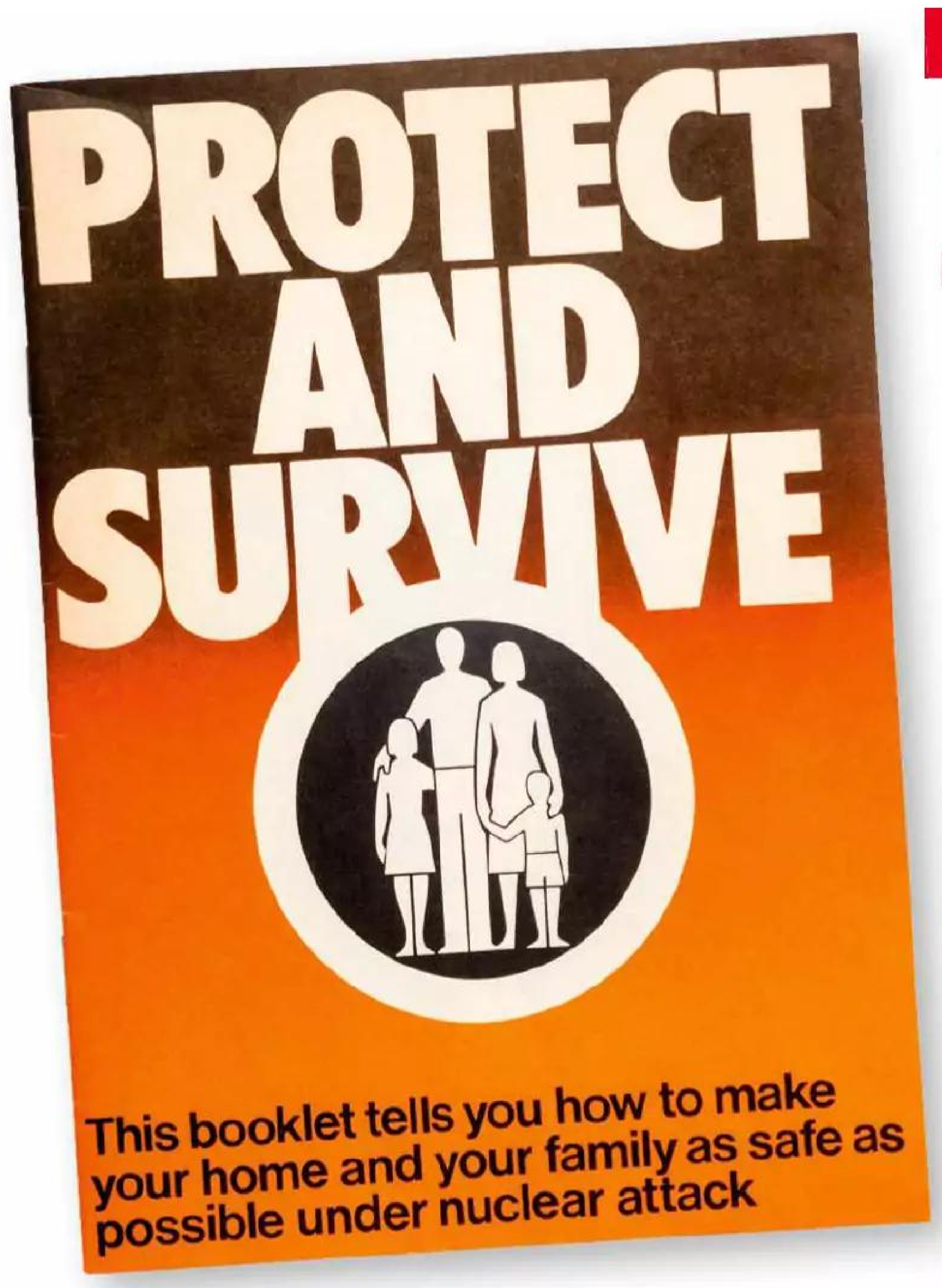
Perhaps more than any other decade in the Cold War era, the 1980s gave voice to novelists, script-writers and musicians with the artistry and imagination to depict what would happen if the unthinkable became a reality.

Of all their many creations across the decade, surely none was as unsparingly brutal as *Threads*. First aired on BBC Two on 23 September 1984, this vision of a Sheffield shattered by the bomb immediately transported its 7 million viewers into the midst of a nuclear winter – a post-apocalyptic nightmare shot in an ultra-realistic docudrama style.

Director Mick Jackson and writer Barry Hines's creation was defined by the failure of civil defence, the breakdown of law and order and the destruction of community. And, as it traced the horrors confronting young couple Ruth Beckett and Jimmy Kemp, *Threads* went where few depictions of nuclear war would tread: the prolonged effects of radioactive contamination and the grim reality of genetic mutation.



A mother holds her child in *Threads*, one of the most shocking dramas to appear on British TV in the 1980s



PROTECT AND SURVIVE

This booklet tells you how to make your home and your family as safe as possible under nuclear attack

The government's pamphlet *Protect and Survive* was meant to advise Britons on how to survive nuclear war

ABSURDITY OF WAR

3 Ridicule greeted government advice on surviving a nuclear strike

One of the triggers for rising east-west tensions in the early 1980s was the US and UK's implementation of a more assertive nuclear policy, championed by their bullish new leaders Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Nuclear brinkmanship was once more a reality and, to many, a Third World War seemed increasingly likely.

With this in mind, you might think the British public would have welcomed the government's civil defence pamphlet *Protect and Survive* (1980), which attempted to reassure Britons that nuclear war wasn't necessarily a death sentence – and that the bricks and mortar of their homes were the best defence against the bomb.

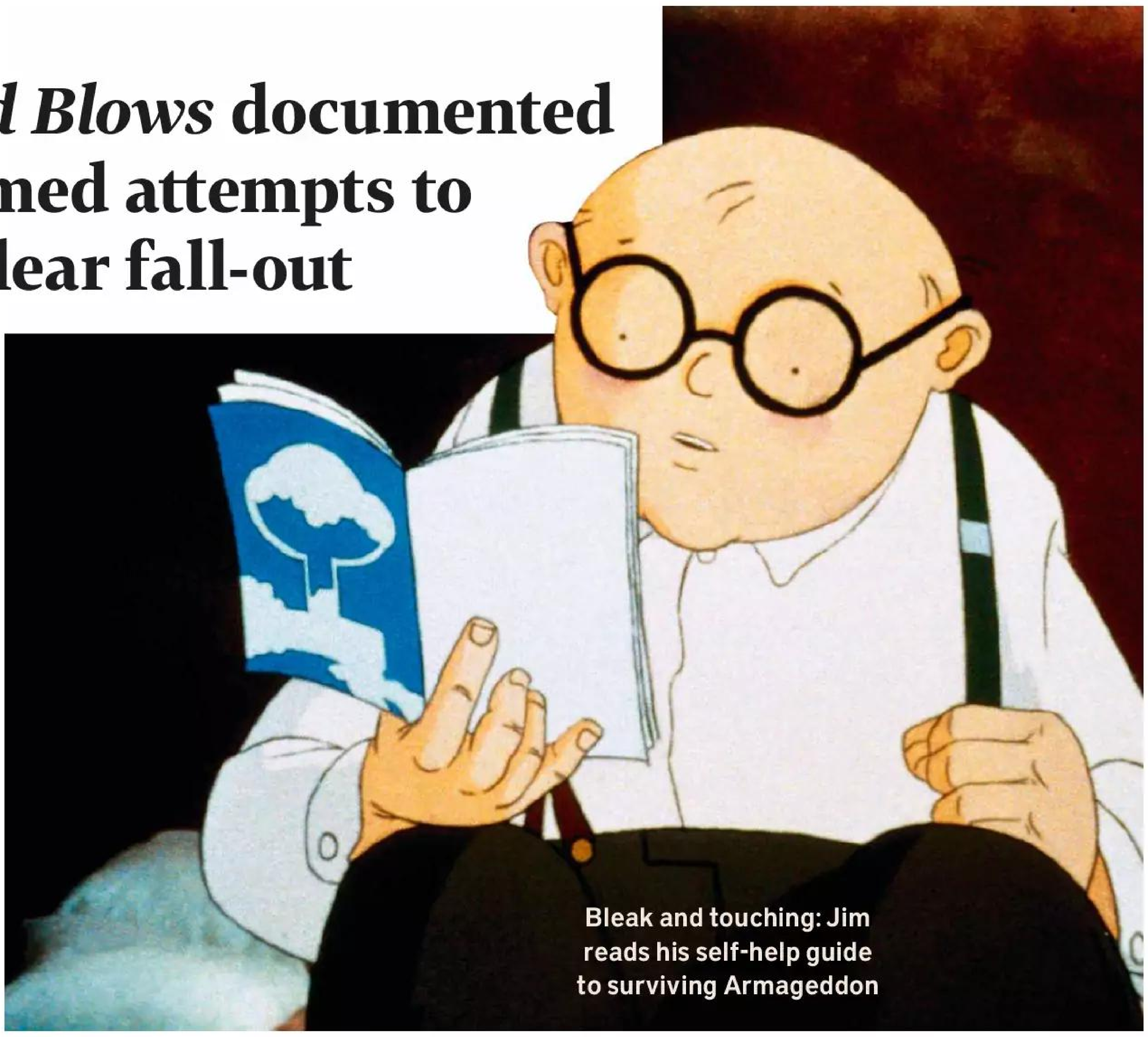
Instead, when its contents emerged in the press, *Protect and Survive* was subjected to a barrage of abuse from anti-nuclear activists and cultural commentators. Critics pointed to the futility of advising people to whitewash their windows to deflect the nuclear flash, and to use interior doors and furniture to create a makeshift fallout shelter.

Ridiculing *Protect and Survive* as impractical and absurd, they ensured that it will always be remembered as an unmitigated PR disaster.

ALAMY

AN EXERCISE IN FUTILITY

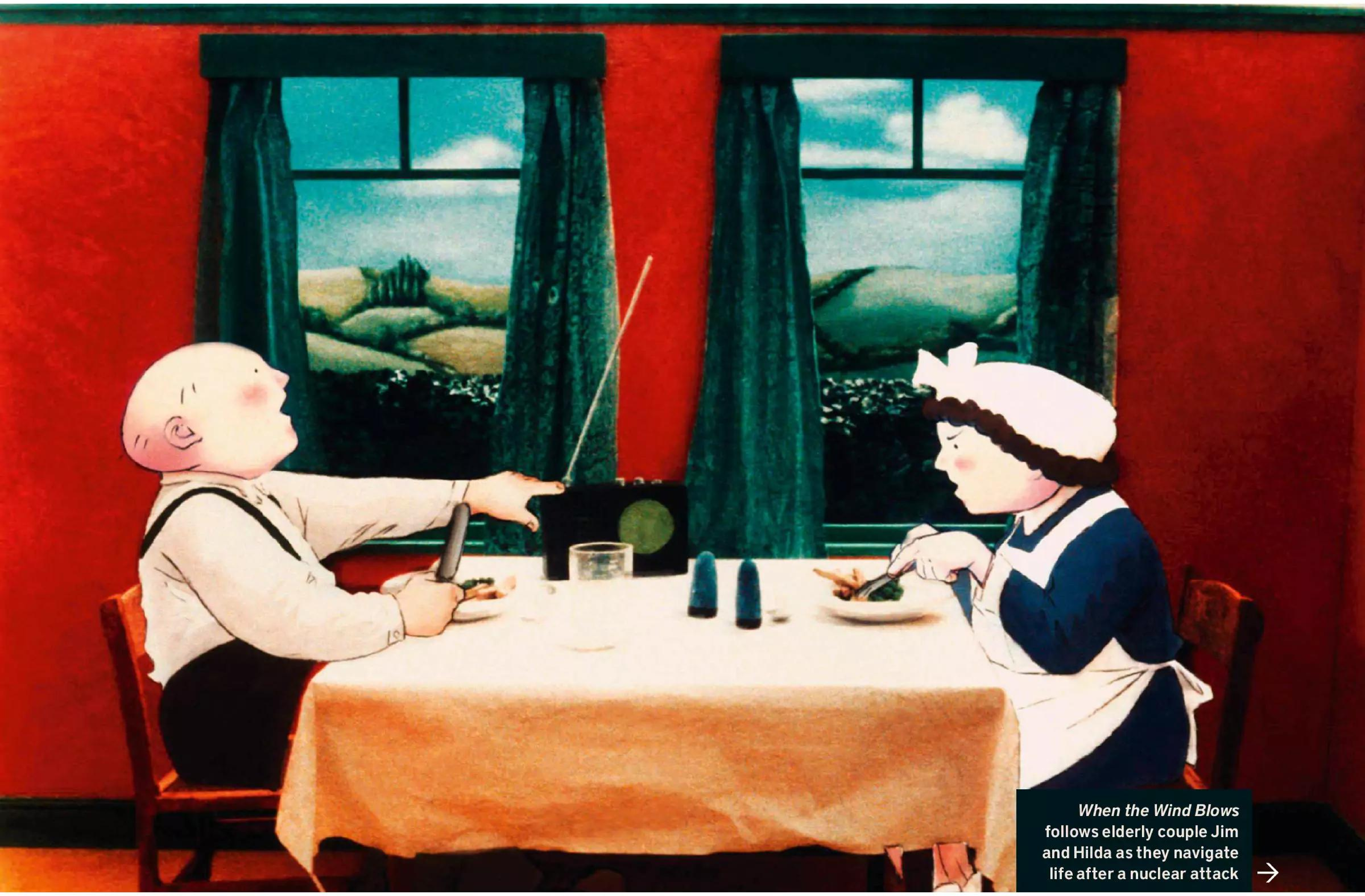
4 *When the Wind Blows* documented a couple's doomed attempts to cheat death by nuclear fall-out


Bleak and touching: Jim reads his self-help guide to surviving Armageddon

Of all the attacks on *Protect and Survive* (see below left) perhaps none was more devastating than *When the Wind Blows*, Raymond Briggs's bleak and touching graphic novel from 1982. On hearing that nuclear attack is imminent, the central characters, a lovable elderly couple called Jim and Hilda, follow the government's civil defence advice to the letter. Yet it proves to be of little help to them as they slowly succumb to the invisible but devastating effects of radioactive fallout.

The book was an emotive and humanising portrayal of the terrible effects of nuclear war, one given even more impact when Briggs's book was made into an animated film in 1986.

ALAMY


When the Wind Blows follows elderly couple Jim and Hilda as they navigate life after a nuclear attack →

BLACK COMEDY

5 Some of the eighties' most popular TV shows endeavoured to raise a laugh from the prospect of humanity's destruction

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in their *Spitting Image* pomp

From rock gods to royalty, and sports stars to supermodels, few public figures escaped *Spitting Image*'s satirical swipe. This mainstay of British culture prided itself on capturing the political zeitgeist of the 1980s. And so it proved in one 1984 episode, which saw Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine (or at least their rubber puppet doubles) concocting a plan to make political capital out of public alarm over nuclear war.

Spitting Image wasn't the only comedy to find the funny side of escalating nuclear tensions – one 1981 episode of *Only Fools and Horses* was set almost entirely in a fallout shelter bought by Del Boy.

Yet, by the second half of the decade, with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev extending the hand of friendship to the west, Britain's comedy writers were increasingly forced to look elsewhere for inspiration. Cold War tensions were waning fast – and nuclear paranoia's impact on Britain's cultural output was waning too.

TEENAGE DIARY

6 Adrian Mole, aged 13¾, fretted about spots and Soviet bombs

Some novelists employed comedy and satire to undermine the tensions that stalked the decade – among them Sue Townsend, author of the *Adrian Mole* series, which brilliantly evoked the anxieties that confronted teenagers in the 1980s. Alongside girls, spots, growing up and sitting exams, Adrian was preoccupied with nuclear war. In *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13¾* (1982), Townsend cleverly intertwined her young hero's concerns. Adrian believed that arguments within his family were caused by the pressures of living in the nuclear age – pressures that saw his mother threaten to move the family to a remote part of Wales in order to survive the apocalypse.

Adrian Mole contemplates nuclear war – or is it his girlfriend, Pandora? – in the TV adaptation of Sue Townsend's books, 1987

ALAMY/SHUTTERSTOCK/REX

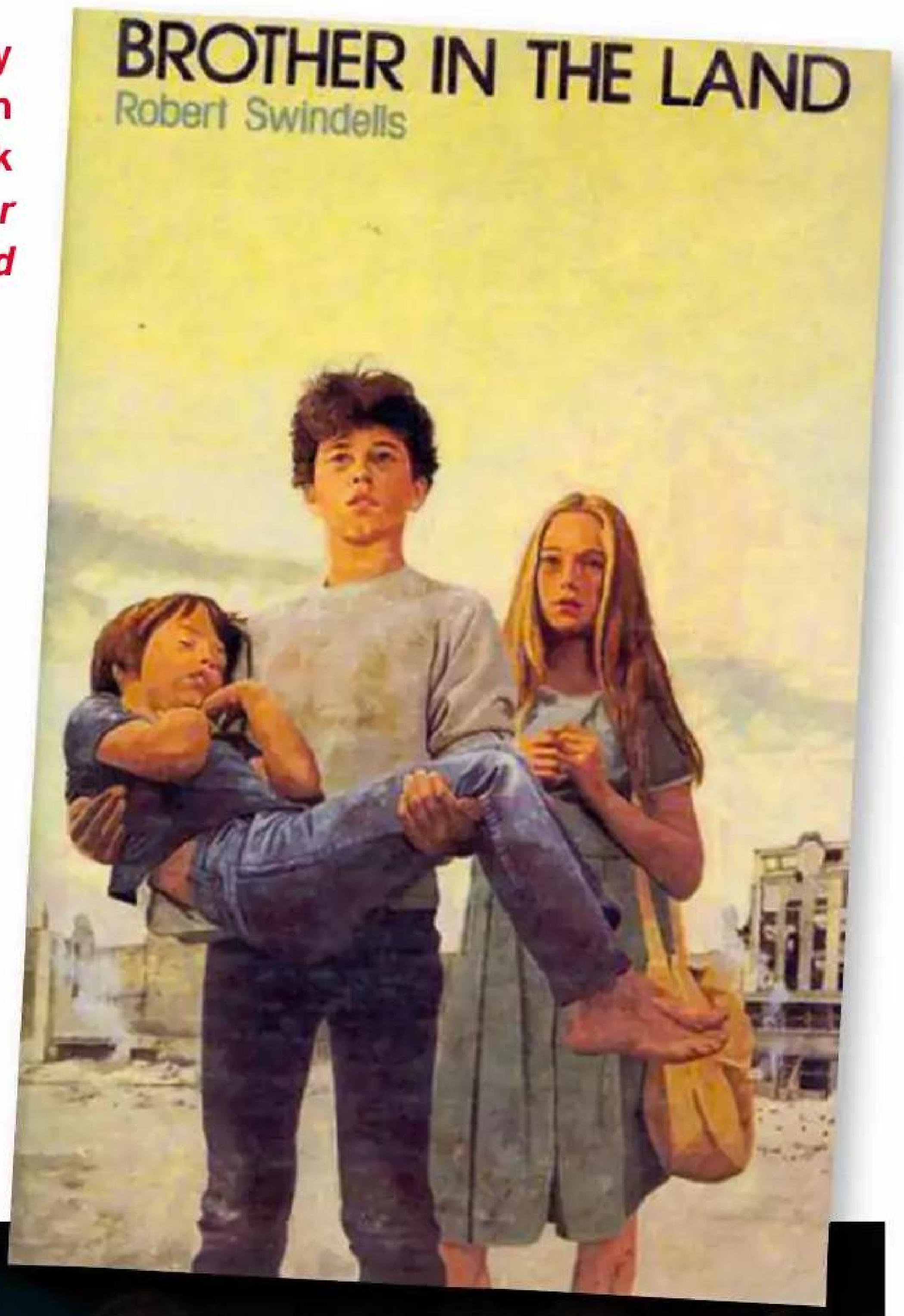
YOUTH FICTION

7 Humanity came under attack in the youth novel *Brother in the Land*

Like *Threads*, Robert Swindells' youth novel *Brother in the Land* (1984) did not shy away from the human cost of nuclear war. The book follows the central character Danny, a teenager who is struggling to survive with the remnants of his family following a nuclear strike.

Danny represents a peaceful, humane response to the social upheaval that nuclear war has wrought. But it is clear that he will need to contend with the violence, selfishness and desperation that defined many people's adaptation to a country ruined by war.

Young Danny confronts an unimaginably bleak future in *Brother in the Land*



PROTEST SONGS

8 A German-language single about an accidental nuclear war came chillingly close to the truth

As anyone who watched the German drama *Deutschland 83* will attest, nuclear paranoia inspired some of the best pop music of the eighties. Everyone from The Clash and Queen to Frankie Goes to Hollywood and The Specials were moved to put their fears of living "in the shadow of the mushroom cloud" (as Queen's Freddie Mercury sang in 'Hammer to Fall') to music.

Some songs, such as '99 Red Balloons', German pop star Nena's tale of a nuclear war starting by mistake, transcended national borders. Originally released in Germany, the English translation became a worldwide hit, topping the UK charts in March 1984.

She couldn't have known it at the time, but Nena's lyrics were chillingly redolent of a real-life nuclear incident that had occurred just months before her single reached UK number one. In November 1983, the Soviet Union readied its forces for war after erroneously interpreting a Nato military exercise, known as 'Able Archer', as a genuine attack. The vast majority of Britons were oblivious but many experts believe that Able Archer was the nearest that the world has come to a nuclear war this side of the Cuban missile crisis. ●

Nena took '99 Red Balloons' to the top of the charts around the world

GETTY IMAGES

Meet the key players who, via negotiations, summits and detentes, helped bring the Cold War to an end

THE THAW

GETTY IMAGES

WHAT BROUGHT A THAW IN THE COLD WAR?

As the Second World War's uneasy alliances unravelled, a new world emerged: of east vs west and of global conflicts as the superpowers vied for influence. From dark days to moments of hope, here, in a feature first published in 2017, we trace the Cold War from 1961 to 1991

BY **DAVID REYNOLDS**

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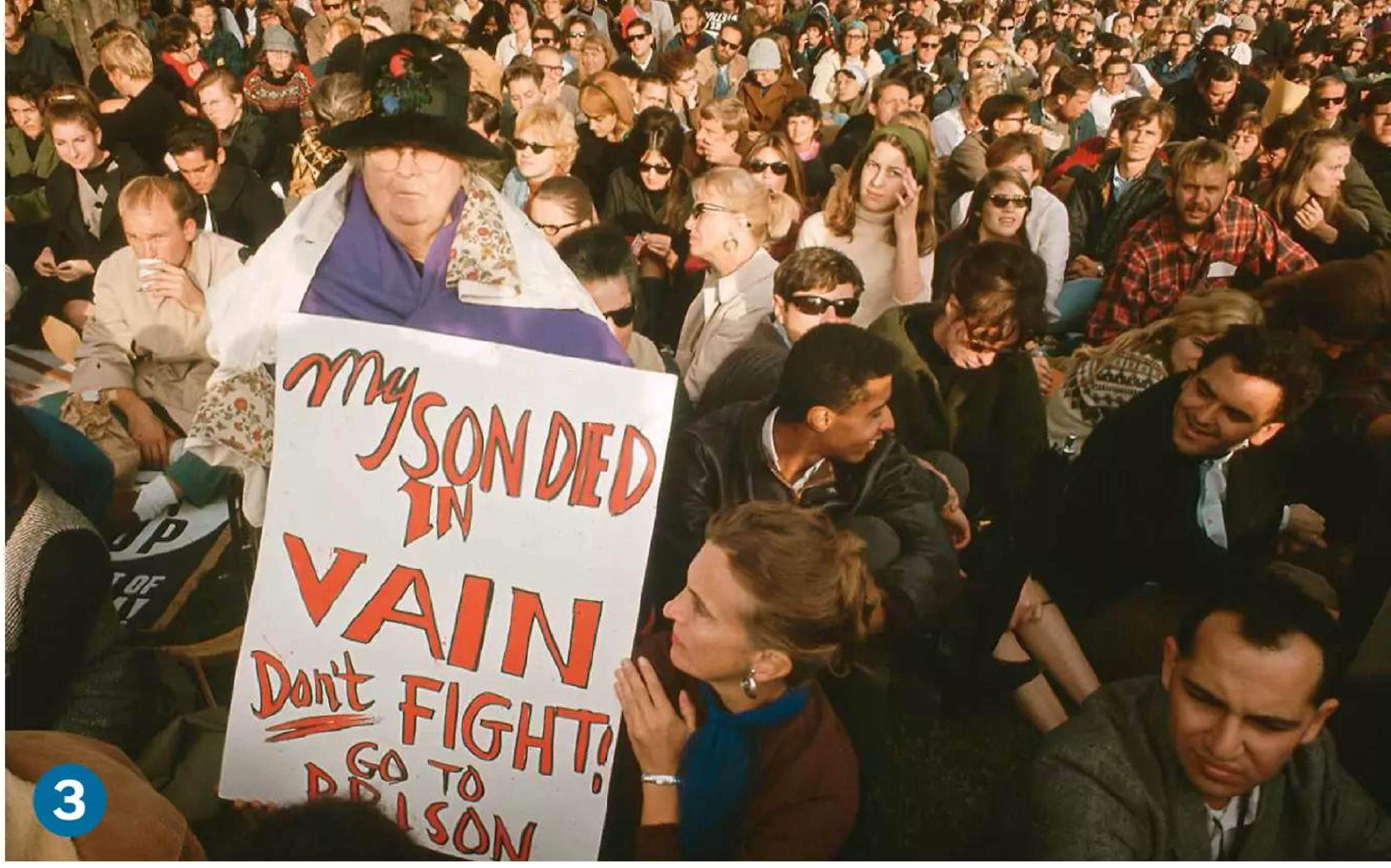

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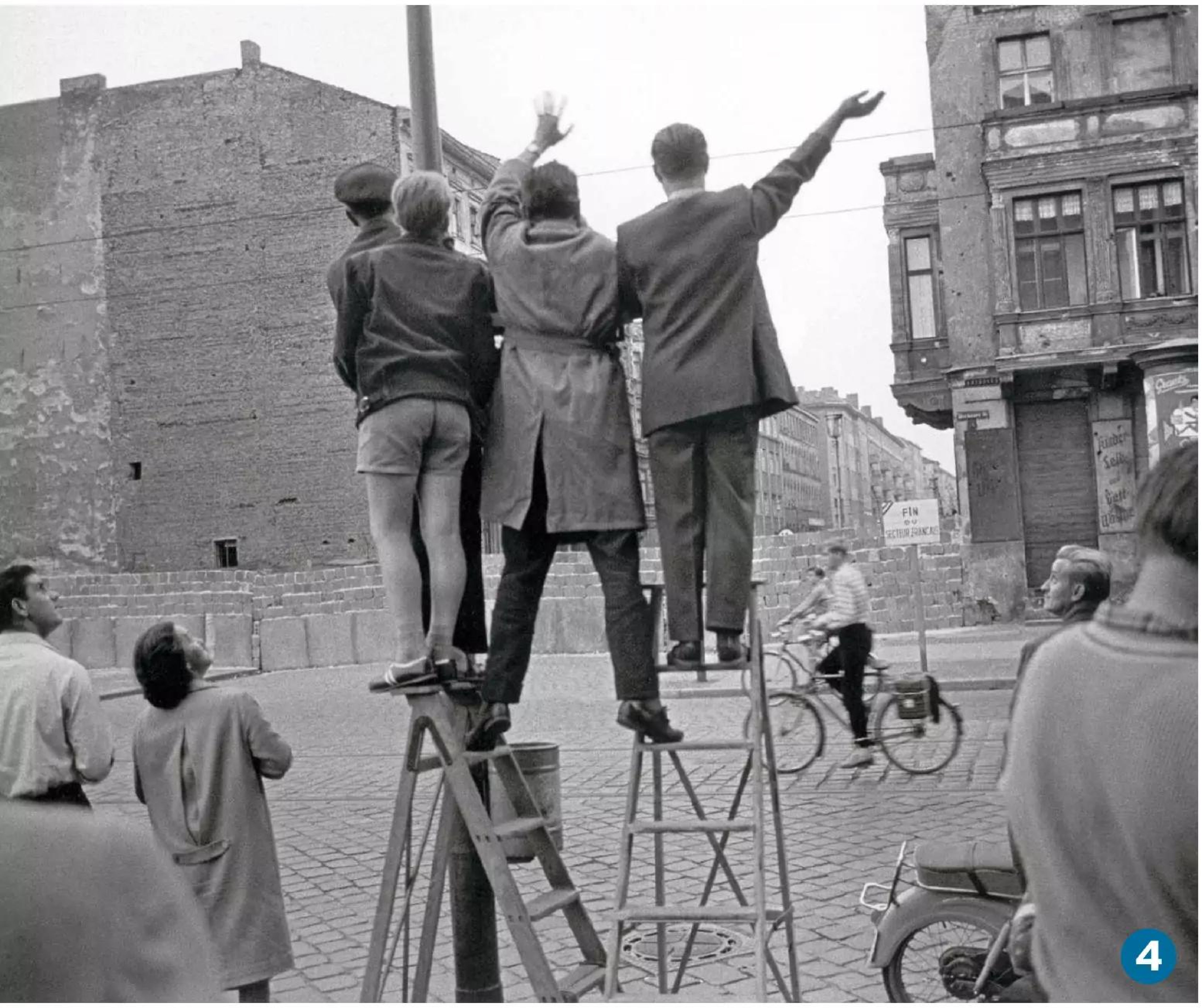
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SNAPSHOTS OF THE COLD WAR

1. Soviet troops start to withdraw from Afghanistan – 'Moscow's Vietnam' – in spring 1988, following the Geneva Accords with the United States

2. Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev start talking about bilateral nuclear arms reductions in Geneva, November 1985

3. By 1967, opposition to the Vietnam War and the Draft was mounting in America

4. West Berliners wave to those on the other side of the then-rudimentary Berlin Wall, 1961

5. A statue of Soviet secret police founder Felix Dzerzhinsky, a potent symbol of Stalinism, is removed from Lubyanka Square, Moscow in August 1991

6. Henry Kissinger shakes hands with North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho as the Paris Peace Accords of January 1973 effectively end US involvement in the war

7. An Angolan boy cleans a Cuban soldier's boots, 1976. Thousands of Cuban soldiers propped up Angola's Marxist government, with Moscow and East Berlin providing further support – a major obstacle for the Soviet–American detente

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By 1985, oil prices were falling and the Soviet economy was literally no longer delivering the goods

In 1961, the Berlin Wall sealed off the last exit from east to west. It also insulated the most dangerous flashpoint in the European Cold War. Gradually both sides of the Iron Curtain settled into the reality of division. No one born in the 1950s and 1960s could imagine anything different.

On the periphery, however, the Cold War was hot and violent. The 1960s saw an escalating conflict in Vietnam, divided after 1945 between the communist north (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam – DRV) and a corrupt southern regime in Saigon (the Republic of Vietnam). The ROV was dominated by the military and became increasingly dependent on the USA after the French abandoned their empire in Indochina in 1954.

In itself, South Vietnam was of no great importance to the Americans. But by 1965 President Lyndon Johnson saw it as an issue of America's global credibility. He also feared that if he didn't act tough abroad against communism, conservatives would block funding for his Great Society programmes at home. "I was determined to be a leader of war and a leader of peace," he remarked later. "I believed America had the resources to do both."

It was astonishing hubris. Neither sustained bombing nor escalating US troop commitments broke Vietnam. Instead, Vietnam broke Johnson. Such was the unpopularity of the war by 1968 that Johnson decided not to run for re-election. And it took his Republican successor, Richard Nixon, all of his first term to extract the USA from its south-east Asian quagmire.

Nixon reaches out

The People's Republic of China (PRC) had become banker and arsenal for the DRV and this forced the USSR – now China's ideological rival for leadership of the communist world – to provide similar aid or lose face. So Nixon had to disengage the two communist superpowers in order to facilitate peace in Vietnam. He and his aide Henry Kissinger were finally able to achieve this with the Paris peace accords of January 1973.

In 1972 Nixon became the first US president to visit the capitals of the two communist superpowers. While in Moscow, he and the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, signed a dozen major agreements to slow the arms race, develop economic relations and promote cultural exchange. The following year, Brezhnev visited America and in 1974 Nixon returned to Russia. It seemed that detente – relaxation of tension – was becoming a pattern.

In Europe, too, old tensions eased. Under the Social Democrat leadership of Willy Brandt, West Germany reached out across the Iron Curtain in 1972, extending de facto recognition with the regime in East Berlin and concluding, with the four Allied occupying powers, agreements on easier access across the Berlin Wall. Brandt's goals were pragmatic: to make life easier for the people of that divided city. He had not abandoned hopes of eventual unification and talked of "change through rapprochement", but never seriously imagined a united Germany in his lifetime.

Yet detente soon stalled. America had been riven by the Vietnam War and then the Watergate scandal, which obliged Nixon to resign in 1974. Heavy borrowing for the war fuelled inflation, exacerbating America's trade and payments deficit and finally forcing the country off the gold standard in 1971. The automatic convertibility of dollars into gold had been a cornerstone of the post-1945 monetary system: the end of that era seemed like another intimation of mortality for the Pax Americana.

The west as a whole was also in economic turmoil in the 1970s, as the long postwar boom collapsed in depression. The catalyst was the oil crisis of 1973, when Arab states hiked up the price of oil in retaliation for the United States' support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War. Ensuing inflation was accompanied by industrial stagnation and rising unemployment, creating a phenomenon called 'stagflation' that defied orthodox Keynesian remedies and left western governments acutely vulnerable against aggrieved voters and workers. The USSR by contrast – an economy heavily dependent on oil and gas exports – did very well from rising energy prices.

As the 1970s progressed, it became clear that 'detente' meant different things on either side of the east-west divide. Washington assumed that the Soviets would now behave themselves and not seek to destabilise a world shaped by American hegemony. Moscow believed that the nuclear parity it had now achieved with the USA provided a chance to expand communism with impunity.

Communist upsurge

In 1975, the whole of Indochina – Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia – fell to the communists in a few months. In Angola in 1975–76, the USSR used troops from Fidel Castro's communist enclave of Cuba to fight against guerrillas backed by the USA and neighbouring South Africa and mobilised Cuban proxies again in 1977–78 to strengthen its position in Ethiopia and Somalia, failed states on the Horn of Africa. One Cuban soldier gloated: "We have done twice what the Yankees could not do once in Vietnam."

Here was arrogant bluster from the other side. The Soviets would find the 'Third World', with failed states and ethnic conflicts, as difficult to manage as the Americans. This became clear in Afghanistan, where the Kremlin intervened at Christmas 1979 to prop up its crumbling influence. Although a new government was quickly installed, the USSR was sucked into a chaotic struggle that dragged on until February 1989 and cost the lives of 15,000 Soviet troops. Afghanistan became Moscow's Vietnam.

I'M FOR
VICTORY IN VIETNAM
NO TRADE WITH SOVIETS

An anti-communism American badge from 1970 supporting the war in Vietnam and opposing US trade with the USSR

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RED TIDE
Young fighters for the Khmer Rouge, the murderous communist regime that ruled Cambodia from 1975–79

BROUGHT TO THE BRINK
The superpowers square up in the sandpit of the Yom Kippur War, as the USSR and the west supply firepower to Israel and Egypt/Syria respectively

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DEM DEUTSCHEN VOLKE

BACK TOGETHER
Elated crowds celebrate Germany's reunification, October 1990. Eleven months earlier, with the Iron Curtain rapidly disintegrating, the Berlin Wall – the concrete manifestation of the decades-long division between east and west – had dramatically come down

But at the end of 1979 this was far in the future. The immediate effect of Soviet intervention was to kill detente. America's beleaguered president Jimmy Carter hyped up the Afghan crisis as "the greatest threat to world peace since the Second World War" and struck back by withdrawing the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty he had recently agreed with Brezhnev in Vienna (SALT II) from Senate ratification. None of this saved him from electoral defeat in November 1980.

Carter's successor was Ronald Reagan, a former movie actor and militant anti-communist, who announced in his first presidential press conference that "so far detente's been a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims". And so the superpowers slid into what was dubbed the 'New Cold War'.

In December 1981, Poland's communist government, locked in a struggle with the Solidarity movement of independent trade unions, imposed martial law to avoid likely intervention by the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. Meanwhile, Nato responded to the Soviet build-up of new SS-20 intermediate-range missiles, aimed at western Europe, with its so-called 'dual track' policy of deploying American Cruise and Pershing II missiles while seeking to negotiate arms reduction from a position of renewed strength. The deployments were pushed through in 1983 by rightist governments in Britain and West Germany, led by Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl. In response, the Soviets withdrew from all arms control talks – the first time for 15 years that the superpowers had not been engaged in any negotiations.

In March 1983, Reagan raised the stakes further with two dramatic speeches. First he told an audience of evangelical Christians that the Soviet leaders were "the focus of evil in the modern world" and insisted that no one should ignore "the aggressive impulses of an evil empire". Two weeks later, he claimed in a TV address that it was now technologically possible to create a strategic defence against nuclear missiles, and called for a massive spending programme to render nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete".

From Star Wars to arms talks

Reagan, as usual, was expressing simplistic ideas without informed understanding, but he had a gift for appealing to the American public. His Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) – dubbed 'Star Wars' by the many sceptics – was turned into a slick propaganda campaign by hawks in the Pentagon, who wanted to exploit US advantages over the USSR in laser and computer technologies. Yet the president himself seems to have genuinely believed in the idea. He loathed the strategic doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction

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(MAD), considering it literally mad. This crusading Cold Warrior was, paradoxically, also an ardent peacenik.

His chance came in March 1985 with an abrupt changing of the guard in the Kremlin. After Brezhnev and two equally geriatric successors had expired within 28 months, the Politburo reluctantly skipped a generation and appointed Mikhail Gorbachev as the new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Born in 1931, Gorbachev was a bright young reformer, part of a new university-educated generation, whose eyes had been opened by visits to the west in the 1970s. The night he was appointed, while walking around the garden (to avoid KGB bugs), he told his wife: "We can't go on living like this."

By now, oil prices were falling and the Soviet command economy was literally no longer delivering the goods. The west, by contrast, had overcome the 1970s' stagflation and was moving into a new era of service industries and the IT revolution. Gorbachev needed to ease the arms burden on the struggling Soviet economy, so he responded eagerly to Reagan's readiness to talk. In a series of four summits from 1985 to 1988, the two leaders engaged in many fiery arguments but also discovered a shared abhorrence of the nuclear age. Indeed, in December 1987, they signed away a whole category of weapons – the intermediate-range nuclear forces, including the SS-20s, Cruise and Pershing II missiles that had bedevilled east-west relations for the past decade. US pressure, including the threat of SDI, had doubtless played a part. But the unprecedented entente also reflected a fundamental change in Soviet security policy based on new concepts such as "reasonable defensive sufficiency" and "common human values". As Gorbachev remarked: "Whatever divides us, we have the same planet to live on."

Advisers gradually persuaded him that the modernisation of Soviet society would require not just economic reforms but also a more open political system. In fact, Gorbachev wanted reform across the whole Soviet bloc, declaring in 1987 that "unity does not mean uniformity" and that there was "no model of socialism to be imitated by all". Eastern Europeans had not forgotten 1956 and 1968, when Gorbachev's predecessors had sent in the tanks to crush reform in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But now they saw, if not exactly a green light from Moscow, at least one that had changed from red to amber.

Many of the problems with which we wrestle today have their roots in the rapid and chaotic events of 1989–91

Walls come tumbling down

In the summer of 1989, the long Polish logjam finally broke when round-table talks and more open elections resulted in victory for a Solidarity-led coalition. By contrast, Hungary's revolution started from the top not the bottom, through splits over reform within the ruling party, but the country also soon moved towards multi-party elections. Beamed around the bloc via radio and television, these dramatic developments galvanised protests in East Germany, whose people – uniquely within the Soviet bloc – had a right of citizenship on the other side of the Iron Curtain if they could reach West Germany.

After Hungary opened its border to Austria in May 1989, the flow became a flood and on 9 November, after shambolic policy decisions, the Berlin Wall itself was opened – fracturing the most notorious symbol of the east-west divide. By Christmas 1989, the communist bloc was a thing of Europe's past. Apart from Romania, the revolution had been remarkably peaceful.

In 1990, the biggest challenge was to resolve the German question. The struggle for mastery of Germany lay at the root of the initial Cold War rift between the wartime allies. The Berlin Wall had temporarily stabilised the issue in 1961, but now, after its fall, the East German state was no longer viable. With Chancellor Helmut Kohl forcing the pace on German unification, another international face-off seemed possible. This was the fear of Margaret Thatcher, whose visceral suspicions of German power dated back to the Second World War.

But President George HW Bush had none of Thatcher's hang-ups. Kohl also worked closely with François Mitterrand in Paris, who was reassured by the chancellor's readiness to anchor the united Germany in an ever closer European Union – including a shared currency, the euro. Chequebook diplomacy from Kohl bought Gorbachev's assent and also the rapid withdrawal of Soviet troops from German soil. On 3 October 1990 the two Germanies became one.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the unification of Germany effectively drew a line under Europe's Cold War. The disintegration of the Soviet Union itself in 1991 was, for American triumphalists, simply the icing on the cake. Yet it is worth reflecting that many of the problems with which we wrestle today have their roots in the rapid and chaotic events of 1989–91: a problematic eurozone riddled with economic contradictions; a European Union that has embraced most of the continent while becoming increasingly flabby; and a humiliated Russia that recovered its nerve under the aggressive leadership of Vladimir Putin. The way the Cold War ended contained many seeds of our present discontents. ●

Solidarność

The Solidarity workers' movement, founded in 1980, drove Poland's move away from communism. In 1990, its founder Lech Wałesa became the country's first non-communist head of state in 45 years

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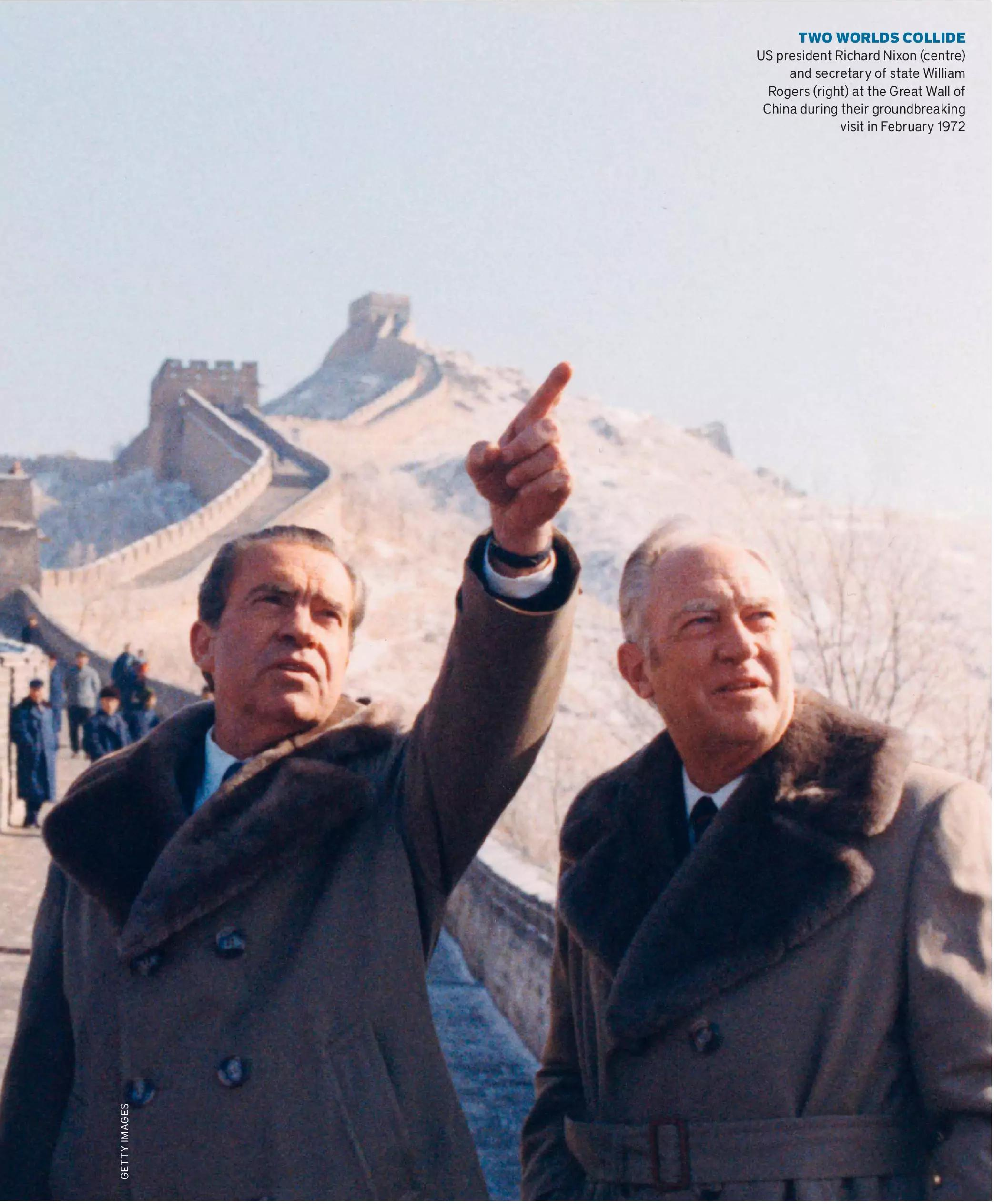
PERSPECTIVES

ONE MOMENT, TWO VIEWPOINTS

The week that changed the world

Following years of icy silence between the US and China, on 21 February 1972 president Richard Nixon arrived in Beijing for an unprecedented diplomatic mission. This is the story of how the two sides viewed an encounter that ushered China onto the global stage

BY **RANA MITTER**



TWO WORLDS COLLIDE
US president Richard Nixon (centre) and secretary of state William Rogers (right) at the Great Wall of China during their groundbreaking visit in February 1972

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SIGNIFICANT MOMENT
Richard Nixon and his wife, Pat, are greeted by Zhou Enlai on their arrival in Beijing on 21 February 1972

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The moment has been immortalised in a breathtaking piece of stagecraft. In the opening scene of the 1987 opera *Nixon in China* the presidential plane, named "The Spirit of '76", lands onstage. The door opens and out steps the singer playing US president Richard Nixon, greeted by another as Chinese premier Zhou Enlai.

When John Adams and Alice Goodman wrote *Nixon in China* they recognised that the meeting it recreated was the stuff of grand opera. Rather than merely two politicians coming face to face, it marked the end of one era and the beginning of a new one – the moment when two great societies with very different systems finally engaged with each other after decades of silence.

Between 21 and 28 February 1972, Nixon met the ageing Mao Zedong, China's paramount leader, and negotiated the first stages of the rapprochement between two countries that had no diplomatic ties in 1949, following Mao's communist revolution.

For Nixon, the mission came at a time when the complex problems of the Cold War were becoming more pressing. He had come to office in 1969 with impeccable qualifications as a Cold Warrior, having made his name as Eisenhower's vice-president in the 1950s, sent out to do rhetorical battle with the Soviet Union. Yet as president he faced a range of difficulties. The US was in flames, its cities riven with unrest. Overseas, his country was caught in the murderous quagmire of the Vietnam War, unable to defeat its opponents or to withdraw honourably. Nixon had been elected in part because he claimed to have a plan to end that war.

Meanwhile, friction with the Soviet bloc was building. In August 1968, months before Nixon was first elected president, Warsaw Pact tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia to snuff out the "Prague Spring" period of political liberalisation.

Nixon certainly hoped that he could reduce tensions in these hotspots for the US through a policy of detente. And his subsequent efforts to improve relations with China provided an opportunity for a dramatic turn of events that would signal an entirely new sort of diplomacy.

US politicians of both parties had mooted a thaw with Beijing in the mid-1960s. However, the outbreak of the violent Cultural Revolution in 1966, during which China dramatically scaled back diplomatic relations with almost all outside powers, left little possibility of a rapprochement under Nixon's predecessor, Lyndon Johnson. Over the following years, the Chinese leadership seemed to be in turmoil. Mao was old, and it was increasingly unclear who would succeed him.

A metaphor for barriers

Yet, even in his first weeks and months in office, Nixon began to set in motion the launch of a new policy – albeit discreetly at first. The new US national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, was given the task of organising the first visit to China by a US official since the 1949 revolution. In 1971, following mediation by Pakistan, Kissinger flew secretly to Beijing for talks. And on 15 July 1971, Nixon announced his planned trip.

> *"It was the moment when two great societies with very different systems finally engaged with each other after decades of silence"*

Nixon had hoped that, on landing in Beijing on 21 February 1972, he would be greeted by crowds of cheering Chinese people. In fact, he had to make do with a small honour guard – but the significance of the moment was cemented when he shook Zhou's hand. At a conference in Geneva 18 years earlier, Zhou's attempt to shake the hand of then US secretary of state John Foster Dulles had been snubbed.

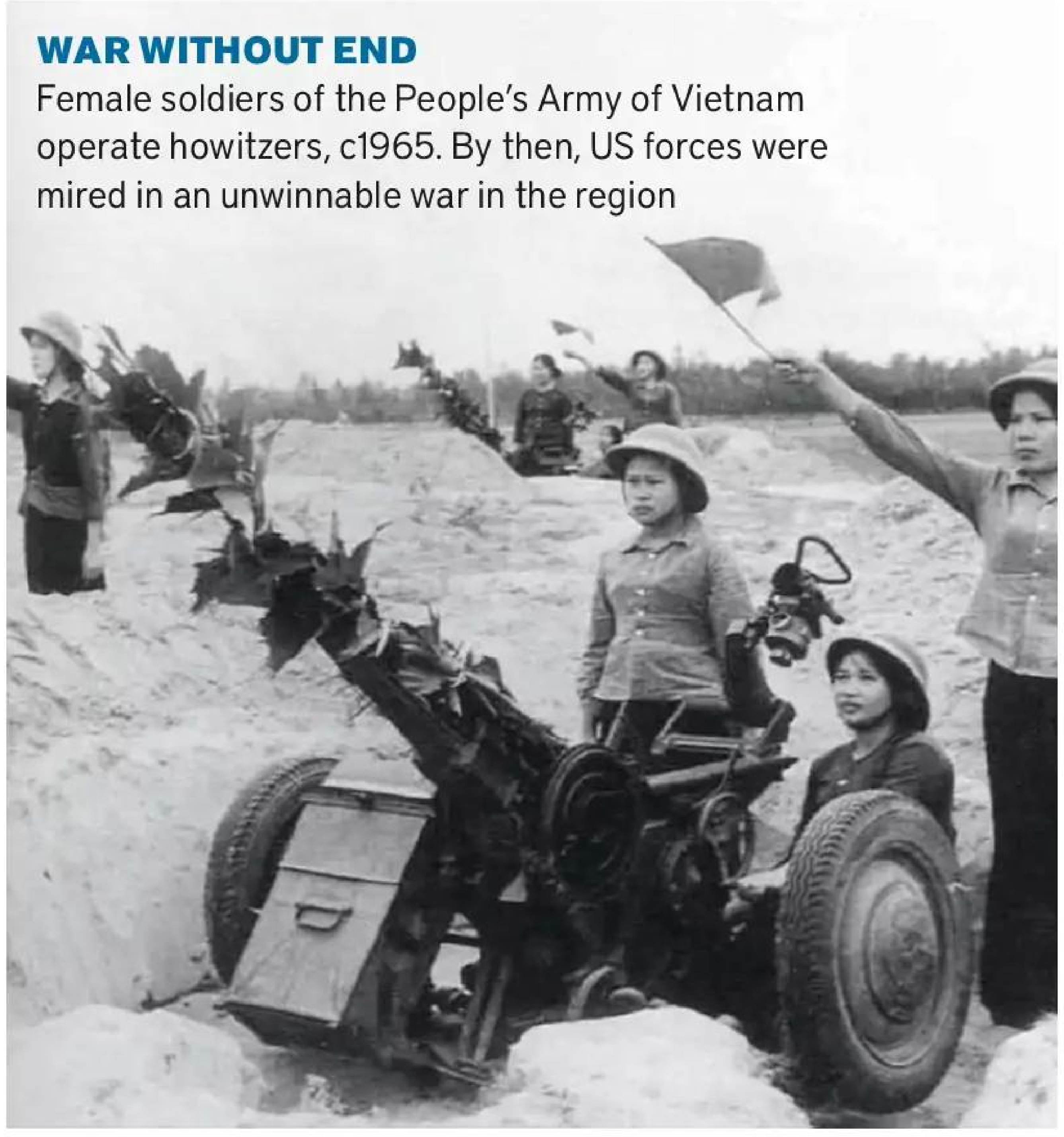
Nixon's party was driven through the city centre to meet Mao, who observed that "reactionaries" had tried to stop the meeting – a reference to figures within China's leadership who were still firmly opposed to opening up to the imperialist enemy. After Mao's one and only appearance during the trip, the negotiators spent long hours in meetings to hammer out an agreement. Between those discussions, the visitors were given the VIP tourist treatment. Nixon was famously impressed by the Great Wall, and used it as a metaphor for barriers that could soon fall in the relationship between China and the US. Meanwhile, the first lady visited schools and factories, providing priceless photo opportunities to boost her husband's campaign for re-election that year.

At the end of the trip, the two sides issued the Shanghai Communique, pledging to improve relations between the countries. Nixon was in no doubt about the significance of what he had negotiated. "This," he declared, "was the week that changed the world."

→ Turn the page to compare US and Chinese views of the historic meeting and discover how it shaped their future relations

DISSENT DASHED
Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia, August 1968. Nixon entered the White House at a time of rising tensions between east and west

WAR WITHOUT END
Female soldiers of the People's Army of Vietnam operate howitzers, c1965. By then, US forces were mired in an unwinnable war in the region



FIRST LADY PHOTO OP
Pat Nixon meets a Chinese woman during the 1972 visit. Such images were useful for her husband's re-election campaign

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THE **US** PERSPECTIVE

"The visit burnished Nixon's image at home – but not for long"

The immediate reaction in the US was highly favourable. Nixon had hoped to make a major gesture of statesmanship ahead of the 1972 presidential election (about which the Chinese were very aware), and his visit to China fulfilled that aim to the letter. Nixon won by a landslide and, though the China visit was not the only reason, it certainly burnished his image. Nixon and his national security adviser (later secretary of state) Henry Kissinger took advantage of the new warmth with China to introduce other strategies to lessen tension in the Cold War – notably, the ending of the draft of US soldiers for the war in Vietnam, and a policy of detente with the Soviet Union.

Protracted negotiation

Nixon's China mission is often regarded as the culmination of a process, and the end of the rift between the US and China. In truth, it was the beginning of a more protracted negotiation. Full diplomatic ties would not actually be confirmed for almost seven years; indeed, during the early and mid-1970s, much of the most visible interaction was cultural rather than political. The most famous manifestation of this was "ping-pong diplomacy", the exhibition table tennis matches played in China and the US in the months before and after Nixon's visit.

Nixon himself had little time to develop the diplomatic opening, resigning in 1974 after the Watergate scandal exposed the darker side of his administration. His successor, Gerald Ford, visited China and tasked secretary of state Henry Kissinger with further nurturing relations. However, there were various stumbling blocks – among the most sensitive of which was Taiwan.

In 1949, at the end of China's civil war, the defeated Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek had fled to Taiwan, where they declared themselves the official government of all China. Despite controlling only Taiwan's main island and a few offshore territories, Chiang's government retained the Chinese seat at the United Nations until 1971. By the mid-1970s, it was clear that the US was moving toward recognition of Beijing, but Chiang's island was a sticking point: China's communist leaders wanted Washington to abandon his regime completely. Yet even if the administrations of Ford and his successor, Jimmy Carter, had wanted to concede this matter, there were still powerful forces in Congress who demanded that the US should permit Taiwan the capacity to defend itself.

The Carter administration eventually negotiated the opening of formal diplomatic relations with China on 1 January 1979. This was dependent on the agreement in the US of a "One China" policy – though without specifying whether the rule of Beijing or Taipei over that "One China" should ultimately prevail. Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, governing America's relationship with that diplomatically unrecognised but important island, decreeing that the US should give Taiwan assistance to enable it to defend itself. To the anger of Beijing, that act is still very much in operation today.

FRIENDS OR FOES?
Mao Zedong greets US secretary of state Henry Kissinger (right) in Beijing in 1975, as president Gerald Ford looks on

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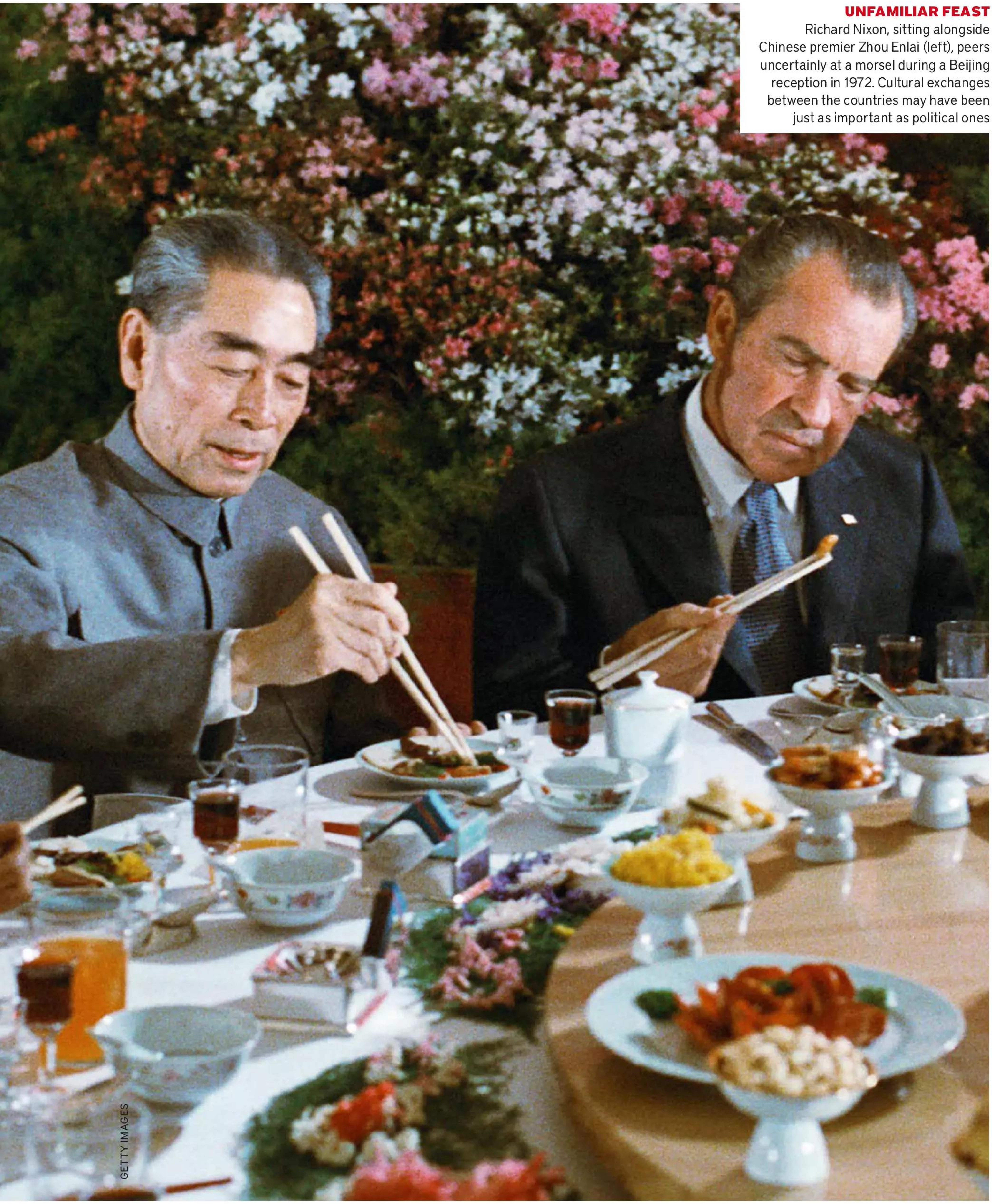

UNFAMILIAR FEAST
Richard Nixon, sitting alongside Chinese premier Zhou Enlai (left), peers uncertainly at a morsel during a Beijing reception in 1972. Cultural exchanges between the countries may have been just as important as political ones

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THE **CHINESE** PERSPECTIVE

"China wasn't on an inevitable path to superpower status"

Nixon's visit did not take place at a quiet time for Chinese politics. In 1972, China was still firmly in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, and there were clear divisions about the significance of the Nixon visit.

One faction, led by premier Zhou Enlai, had come to realise that China's inward-looking take on economics and culture was not sustainable; they believed that the country would have to reform if the CCP was to stay in power. A world in which China was isolated both from the Soviet bloc and the western world was unsustainable and, since relations with Moscow continued to be scratchy following China's denunciation of Soviet policy from the late 1950s, a pivot towards the huge market that the US offered was a logical step for an economy aiming to re-enter the world of international trade.

That view was firmly opposed by the Cultural Revolution hardliners, most notably the leaders later dubbed the "Gang of Four", including Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. They regarded ideological purity as the most important element of China's politics, so the idea of opening up to the capitalist US proposed by "running dogs" (lackeys) was anathema.

During Nixon's visit, the faction in favour of opening up was in the ascendant, and Jiang Qing even greeted the Americans. But on the evening before the Shanghai Communique was released, Zhang Chunqiao – one of the Gang of Four – made a speech at the banquet for Nixon's party, declaring that Shanghai was "maintaining independence" and "relying on our own efforts".

In retrospect, it sometimes seems as if China was on an inevitable path to economic superpower status after Nixon's visit opened up the country. In fact, the years that followed were turbulent. In 1973, Zhou's enemies launched a campaign obliquely criticising his willingness to open up to the US. By then, he was dying of cancer, passing away just a few months before Mao in 1976. Shortly afterwards, Zhou's protege Deng Xiaoping was sidelined by the Gang of Four.

Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng, rapidly moved to have the Gang of Four arrested, and the Cultural Revolution was declared over. The next year, 1977, writers and artists were allowed to produce accounts of the horrors they had suffered during the worst years of the Cultural Revolution.

By July of that year, Deng had used his formidable political network to return to power. From 1978, he began implementing major market-oriented reforms and pushed forward with efforts to improve relations with the US. In 1979, following Carter's recognition of China, he also broke with precedent and travelled to the US – a visit epitomised by a moment in Texas when the diminutive Deng donned a large Stetson hat. The US-China relationship may have been secured diplomatically with the establishment of embassies earlier that year, but the emotional relationship was sealed at that rodeo, signalling a decade of closer ties.

Liberalising culture

During the 1980s, the relationship between the US and China was the warmest it had been since the latter's communist revolution. American writers and intellectuals were invited to share their ideas to help influence China's new, liberalising culture. That decade was also the era of Reagan's confident US, as well as a sclerosis that augured the ultimate end of Europe's communist eastern bloc.

China wanted access to the US market, and, despite their communist links, the Chinese saw little to tempt them in the Soviet world of Brezhnev and his successors, who were mired in a war in Afghanistan and whose eastern European allies such as Poland were increasingly afflicted by economic woes.

In one of the most remarkable gestures of affinity, the popular 1988 television programme *River Elegy*, proudly showcased icons of American life, including the Statue of Liberty. This wave of almost naive pro-Americanism came crashing to a halt with the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Yet despite that bloody crackdown, recent evidence reveals that president George Bush sent national security adviser Brent Scowcroft to visit Deng Xiaoping in secret just a month after the killings, to assure China that the US still wanted to keep the relationship alive. The tradition of angry rhetoric on the surface but an understanding about shared interests in private – evident in the Nixon-Kissinger visit of 1972 – was still very much alive.

Is that still true today? The jury is out. The US and China are now clear rivals, rather than the "frenemies" they became during the Nixon era. In April 2025, Donald Trump announced major new tariffs on China as part of a wider trade war. That visit of 1972 remains a moment of historic importance – but its significance seems very different today from what it did in that cold February week in Beijing, half a century ago. ●

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GANG FLANK
Richard Nixon sits between Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qiang, Mao Zedong's wife and a leader of the "Gang of Four", who opposed China opening up to the capitalist US

HEAD GEAR
Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping accepts a Stetson hat in Texas during a 1979 US visit. "The emotional relationship was sealed at that rodeo, signalling a decade of closer ties," says Rana Mitter

DEMANDS FOR DEMOCRACY
Protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, June 1989. The brutal crushing of these demonstrations strained US-Chinese relations

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

FREUNDSCHAFT
ANNERTRÄGER DES F
OLLWERK
DER WELT
Atomwaffe

Die Jugend
der DDR
grüßt
die Jugend
der Welt

KALEIDOSCOPIC NATION

Amid the darkness of economic hardship and state-sponsored fear, East Germany could also be a society of opportunity and hope. Here we profile some of the people whose stories bring this full, complex picture to life

BY **KATJA HOYER**

POP AND POLITICS
TOP ROW Scenes from the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students, held in East Berlin in the summer of 1973
FAR LEFT Socialist youth group Freie Deutsche Jugend organise a rally, 1950
LEFT Shoppers queue outside a store in Leipzig.
These twin threads – new creative freedoms and political and economic challenges – reflect the contradictions at the heart of East Germany

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For all the spirit of the younger generation, **the infant GDR struggled with its reparations load**

The warm summer air hummed with music and energy. Drums sent rhythmic undercurrents through the streets as young people danced, debated, sang and kissed. Alcohol flowed freely. Ideas were exchanged in dozens of languages as concerts, marches, floats, talks and spontaneous jam sessions combined to give the sense of a bustling festival. This gathering of idealists and dreamers was held not at Woodstock or Glastonbury but in East Berlin, where 8 million people flocked between 28 July and 5 August 1973 to attend the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students. Its tagline: For Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship.

More than two decades had passed since East Germany, formally known as the German Democratic Republic (GDR), had been established on 7 October 1949 as a socialist counterpoint to its capitalist neighbour in the west, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), founded in May of the same year. During that time, the two German states had coexisted in tense competition, straddling the faultlines of the Cold War.

We like to think of the world around us in clear categories, and the divided Germany is no different. The west began to see the GDR and the FRG as black-and-white versions of Germany – a vision that lasts to this day. Where the West is portrayed as a functioning democracy with a prosperous and free society, the East is seen only as an oppressive dictatorship whose planned economy caused so much misery that people had to be walled in to make them stay. One was good, the other evil – and any attempt to complicate the picture of the evil also throws up uncomfortable questions about the nature of good.

For western observers, it is therefore as tempting to be as cynical about the 1973 Youth Festival today as it was at the time. A few days before it began, the West German political magazine *Der Spiegel* called the upcoming event a "propaganda show of Eastern European state communism". The same outlet concluded in a 2008 feature that "a few little freedoms were granted – so that the great restrictions might fall into oblivion". The image of a summer of colour, noise and youthful exuberance jars uncomfortably with the more familiar vision of a grey, subdued and crumbling world unfolding behind the Iron Curtain, so it is explained away. The festival was an anomaly, a falsehood, at best a respite from the oppressive drudge that must have been the norm. But, as exploring the lives and stories of a diverse cast of characters reveals, the real story is much more complicated.

Those heady days of music and debate in 1973 were widely remembered as an exciting time. Uwe Schmieder, who was 13, experienced the festival as if in a dream. He was technically not old enough to participate in events organised by the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend; FDJ), the GDR's mass organisation to which the vast majority of young people between the ages of 14 and 25 belonged. But his local group from the small town of Zeitz needed another drummer, so Uwe donned the FDJ's cornflower-blue shirt and proudly beat his marching drum in the heart of East Germany's capital. Uwe found the atmosphere "intoxicating," recalling "the peace, friendship and the chants… I felt very close to the country at that moment".

Many young East Germans felt the festival proved that the state in which they had grown up had arrived in the world. Just a few weeks later, on 18 September 1973, East Germany would be admitted into the United Nations alongside West Germany. The previous year, both states had already acknowledged each other's sovereignty in the so-called Basic Treaty. By the end of the decade, the GDR had embassies in nearly 200 states. It seemed to have become a country like any other.

Dreams of nationhood

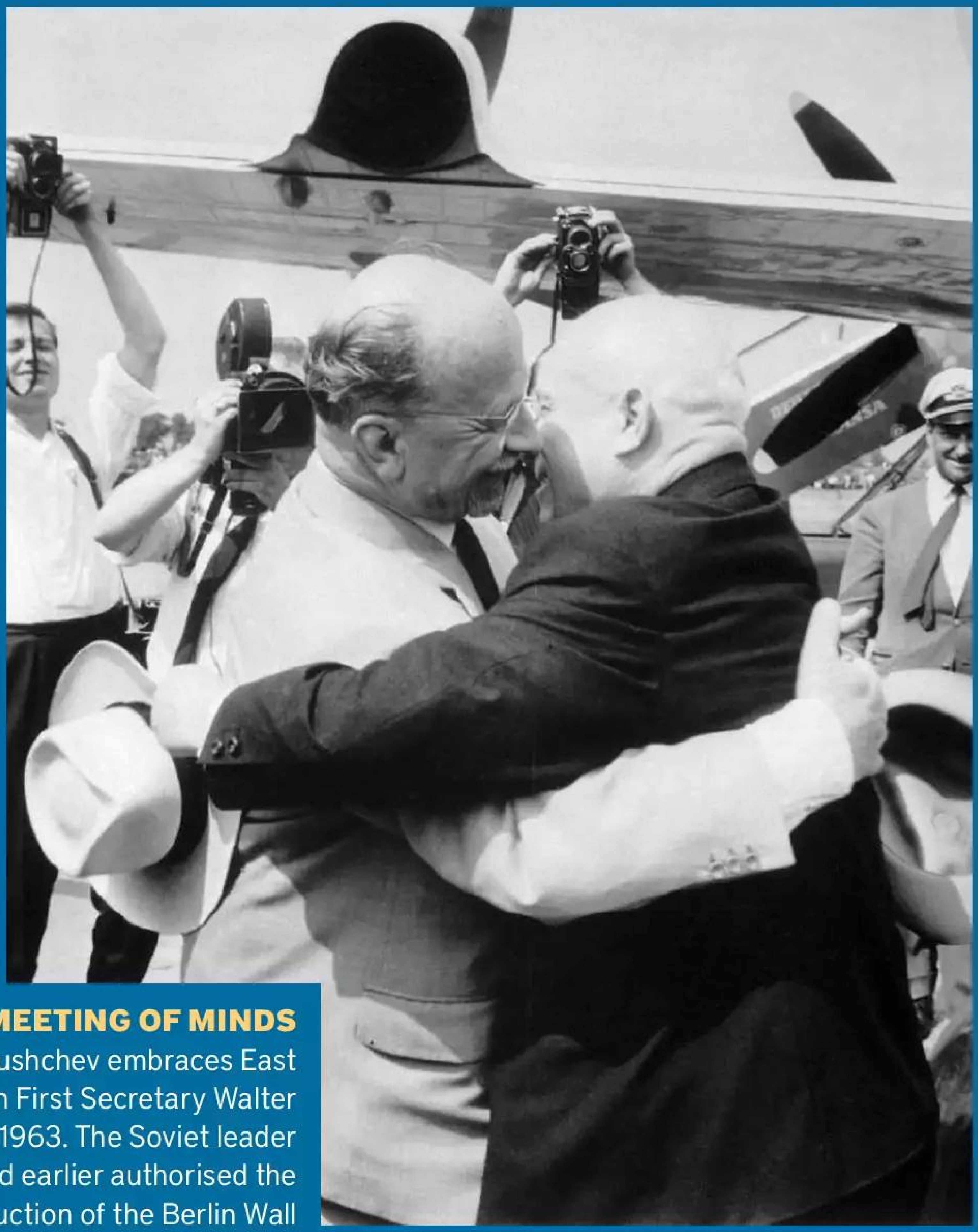
As if to emphasise that a new era was dawning, the state's founder and long-time leader Walter Ulbricht died at the age of 80, while the Youth Festival was under way. He was a communist of the old guard, who had experienced the calamitous first half of the 20th century. A carpenter by trade, he had fought in and against the First World War, taking part in the 1918 November Revolution that helped topple Germany's monarchy. During the 1920s, he became a rising star of the German Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands; KPD) and one of its members of parliament. His heated verbal battles with the Nazis' head of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, ended in brutal brawls between their followers – a dark sign of things to come. As was the case with many fellow communists, Ulbricht had to flee Germany when Adolf Hitler became chancellor in 1933.

Ulbricht spent the Second World War exiled in Moscow, where he survived Soviet leader Josef Stalin's deadly political purges. That was no mean feat. Of the nine German members of the KPD's politburo who had gone into exile in the Soviet Union, only two were still alive at the end of the war: Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, who later became president of the GDR.

Ulbricht survived because he had proved his worth to Stalin, working tirelessly to undermine the German war effort. At the 1942–43 battle of Stalingrad, in which the men of Germany's Sixth Army, freezing and starving to death, were surrounded by enemy troops, Ulbricht's high-pitched voice had blared into their numb ears. Giant speakers had been rolled up to the front line so that Ulbricht could inform his compatriots that their fight was futile. One of Stalin's men sceptically supervised the proceedings, and as Nikita Khrushchev – then working as an intermediary between Stalin and his generals – chuckled at supper: "Well, Comrade Ulbricht, it doesn't look as if you have earned your dinner tonight. No Germans have surrendered."

But Ulbricht had earned Stalin's trust. Together with nine other men, he was deployed back to Germany on 30 April 1945, the day Hitler shot himself in his bunker beneath a ruined Berlin. It was Ulbricht's taskforce that would attempt to raise a new and radically different country out of the smouldering ashes of the old. Stalin originally held him back, thinking it would be easier to exploit the resources of a neutral country that wasn't his responsibility. Once

BLOWN OFF COURSE
A glassworker in Lauscha, East Germany, c1950. The faltering economy meant that people had to work longer hours and extra shifts



MEETING OF MINDS
Nikita Khrushchev embraces East German First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, 1963. The Soviet leader had earlier authorised the construction of the Berlin Wall

FOR PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP
A woman sells posters during the World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin, July 1973. Its tagline was 'For Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship'

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GETTY IMAGES

the two Germanies were set up as separate states in 1949, though, there was no going back. Ulbricht was allowed to fulfil his lifelong dream: to build socialism on German soil.

Many Germans, particularly those of the younger generations, wholeheartedly bought into the idea of building a better country after the horrors of militarism and Nazism. Regina Faustmann was 16 in 1951, and had already experienced her fair share of upheaval. Her father had died in 1945, leaving his wife to look after their three children just as the Red Army was advancing. Now it was time for Regina to roll up her sleeves. She began an apprenticeship as a chemical lab technician at a local tyre manufacturer. It was not what she had dreamed of doing with her life – she had wanted to become a seamstress, like many in her family before her – but that didn't work out. She needed to help support the family.

At that point, a handsome young tyremaker named Günther entered Regina's life. Together, they began to frequent the new theatres, dance clubs and cinemas that were springing up everywhere. Both had joined the newly established FDJ. Though a Catholic, Regina felt included in the wide range of activities on offer, which she undertook alongside her Protestant and non-religious peers, including those who had previously been enthusiastic Hitler Youth members. There were social activities and music to enjoy, but also serious work to help rebuild Germany, including the collection of scrap metal. As she put it many decades later, it felt good to be part of a collective effort to "build the new young democracy we had been gifted".

Yet, for all the younger generation's enthusiasm and can-do spirit, the infant GDR struggled under its heavy reparations load. The Soviets had a habit of turning up unannounced at Regina's tyre factory to confiscate the goods that had just been manufactured, which disrupted production schedules.

Shattered hopes

This kind of action played out all over East Germany. Reparations payments ranged from private looting and wanton vandalism to the abduction of specialists to the Soviet Union and the systematic dismantling of entire factories. By 1949, before the state had even been established, one third of the East German industrial economy had already vanished, and by 1953 the Soviets had officially taken reparations and compensation for occupation costs in excess of $15bn. The GDR had no chance to get on its feet.

East Germans saw beyond the narrow lines prescribed by the Stasi to produce a rich cultural landscape

As living standards sank and the workload for ordinary people became unbearable, the forward-looking spirit of the early years shattered. At 17 years old, Heinz Just dragged himself every day to a dead-end job at the metal factory in Leipzig – but he'd had enough. Operating three machines simultaneously in a shift system that included night work and irregular hours, he stared at his tax summary in December 1952 in grim resignation. He had earned 250 marks a month: just above minimum wage. This was not enough to move out of his parents' house. As he later remembered with some bitterness, he didn't even feel it was enough to get a girlfriend.

When East Germans sought dialogue with Ulbricht, he ignored them. Even as the workers of East Berlin began to protest on 16 June 1953, marching down the aptly named Stalinallee towards the government building where they demanded to speak with Ulbricht, the general secretary was still in denial. "But it's raining," he insisted. "That will disperse them." It didn't.

The next day, a general strike swept across the entire state, with one million people estimated to have taken part. Soviet troops were called in to pitilessly crush the uprising. The total number of deaths is still highly disputed, but historians estimate that at least 55 pro-

REGIME UNDER PRESSURE
Demonstrators at the gates of the Stasi headquarters in Leipzig, 1989. The state security service became a focus of that year's protests

ALAMY

TIMELINE

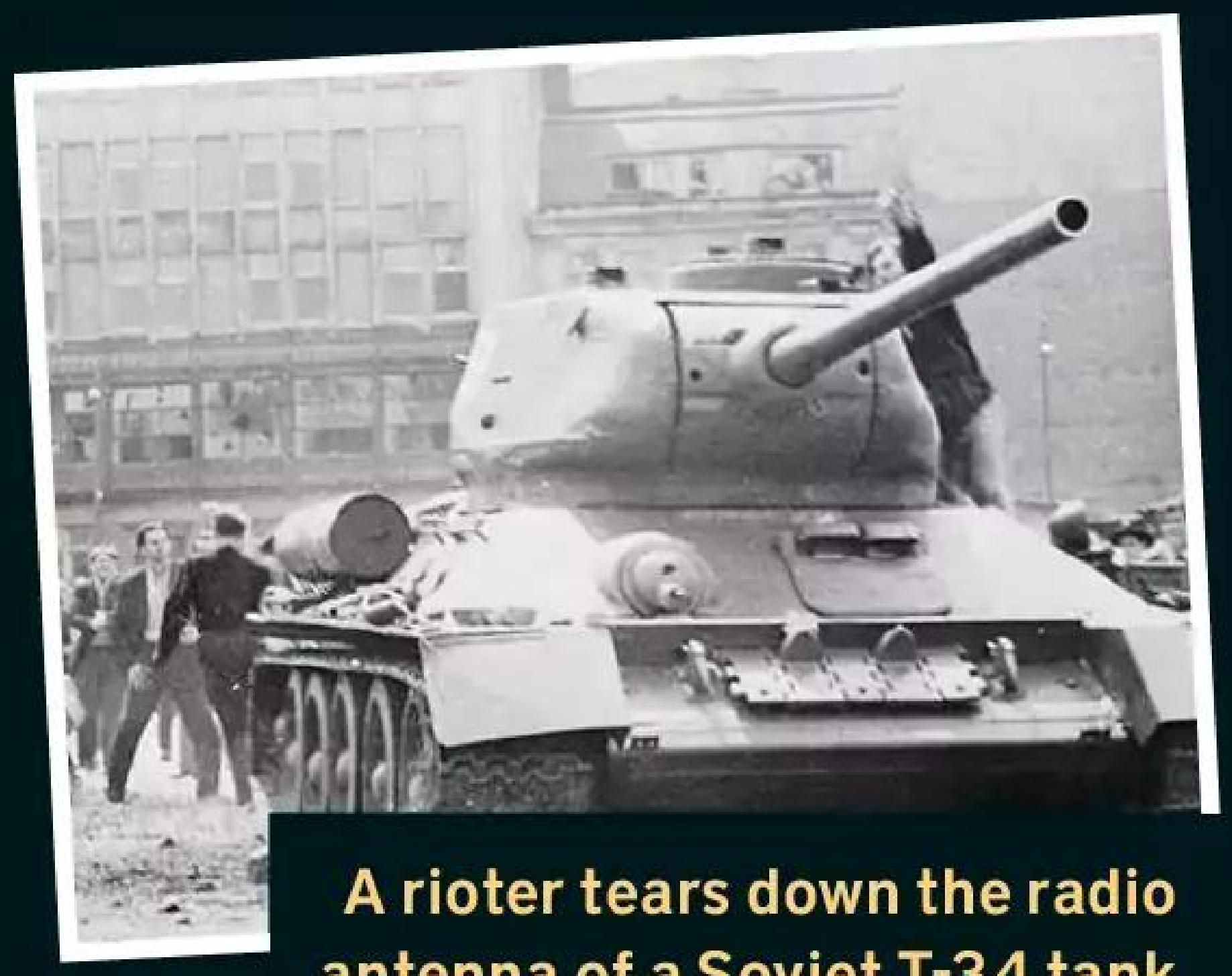
KEY MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF A NATION

7 October 1949

East Germany is born The German Democratic Republic is founded. Wilhelm Pieck becomes its president, Otto Grotewohl its minister-president. Real power lies with Walter Ulbricht (left), one of Grotewohl's deputies and, from 1950, general secretary of the ruling party.

8 February 1950

State surveillance begins The Ministry for State Security, known as the Stasi, is established. Acting as "Sword and Shield of the Party", under long-term leader Erich Mielke it becomes one of the most comprehensive state security organisations ever.



A rioter tears down the radio antenna of a Soviet T-34 tank in East Berlin during the general strike of 1953

17 June 1953

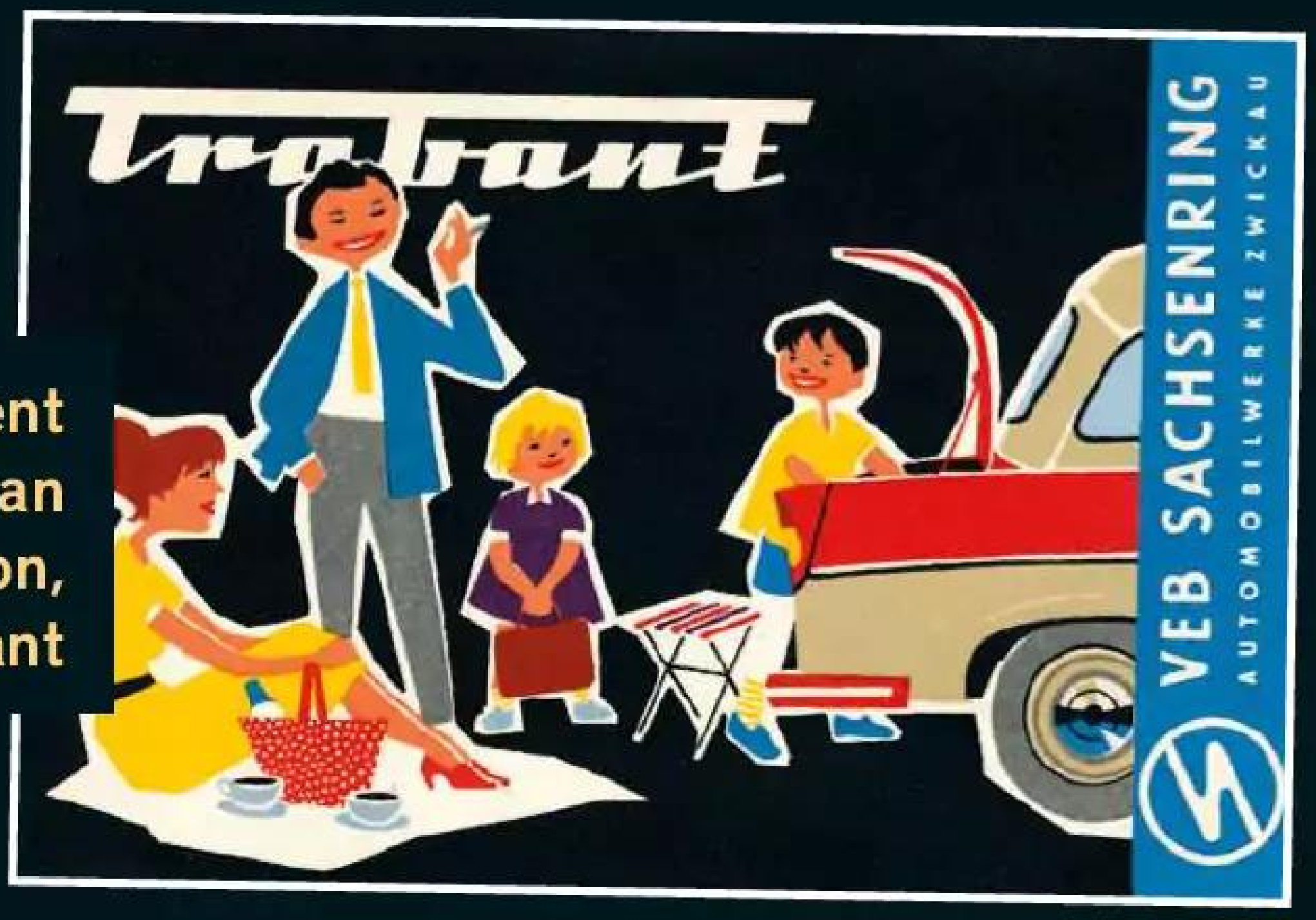
A nation explodes
A general strike against work conditions erupts into a national uprising involving around 1 million people. It's brutally crushed by Soviet forces. In the immediate aftermath, the government is forced to improve living standards.

14 May 1955

The east strikes back Following West Germany's integration into Nato on 6 May, a Soviet-led alliance, the "Warsaw Pact", is set up. East Germany is a founding member.

13 August 1961

The wall rises East German authorities close the border between East and West Berlin, and work on the Berlin Wall begins. Since 1949, 2.6 million people had left the GDR; now this is almost impossible.



An early advertisement for an East German motoring sensation, the Trabant

1 March 1964

An icon is unveiled The Trabant 601 is presented to the public and put into serial production. By 1988, nearly 2 million "Trabis" have been registered. It becomes an icon for the GDR as a whole.

3 May 1971

New leader, same story
Erich Honecker (right) replaces Walter Ulbricht as leader of the GDR. Nearly two decades Ulbricht's junior, Honecker initially seems set to usher in a period of liberalisation and change – but hopes for true reform are soon dashed.

28 July 1973

The GDR parties The 10th World Festival of Youth and Students begins in East Berlin. Sometimes referred to as the "Woodstock of the east", it brings 8 million visitors from 140 countries to the city.

Sigmund Jähn (right) with Soviet cosmonaut Valery Bykovsky after landing back on Earth in September 1978

26 August 1978

A nation reaches the stars
Forty-one-year-old East German cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn becomes the first German in space. Upon his return he is awarded the titles "Hero of the German Democratic Republic" and "Hero of the Soviet Union".

Gorbachev in France in 1985, the year he became the Soviet leader

11 March 1985

A new era dawns
Mikhail Gorbachev becomes leader of the Soviet Union. He ushers in domestic reforms and allows other Warsaw Pact nations to do the same, putting pressure on GDR officials to react to reform movements at home.

9 November 1989

The wall topples The Berlin Wall falls. Honecker had stepped down in October, handing power to Egon Krenz, whose reforms prove too little, too late. Mass demonstrations turn into the "Peaceful Revolution" that brings down the wall.

3 October 1990

A nation is reunited East and West Germany are officially reunified and become one nation for the first time since 1945. The day, dubbed "German Unity Day", becomes an annual national public holiday. →

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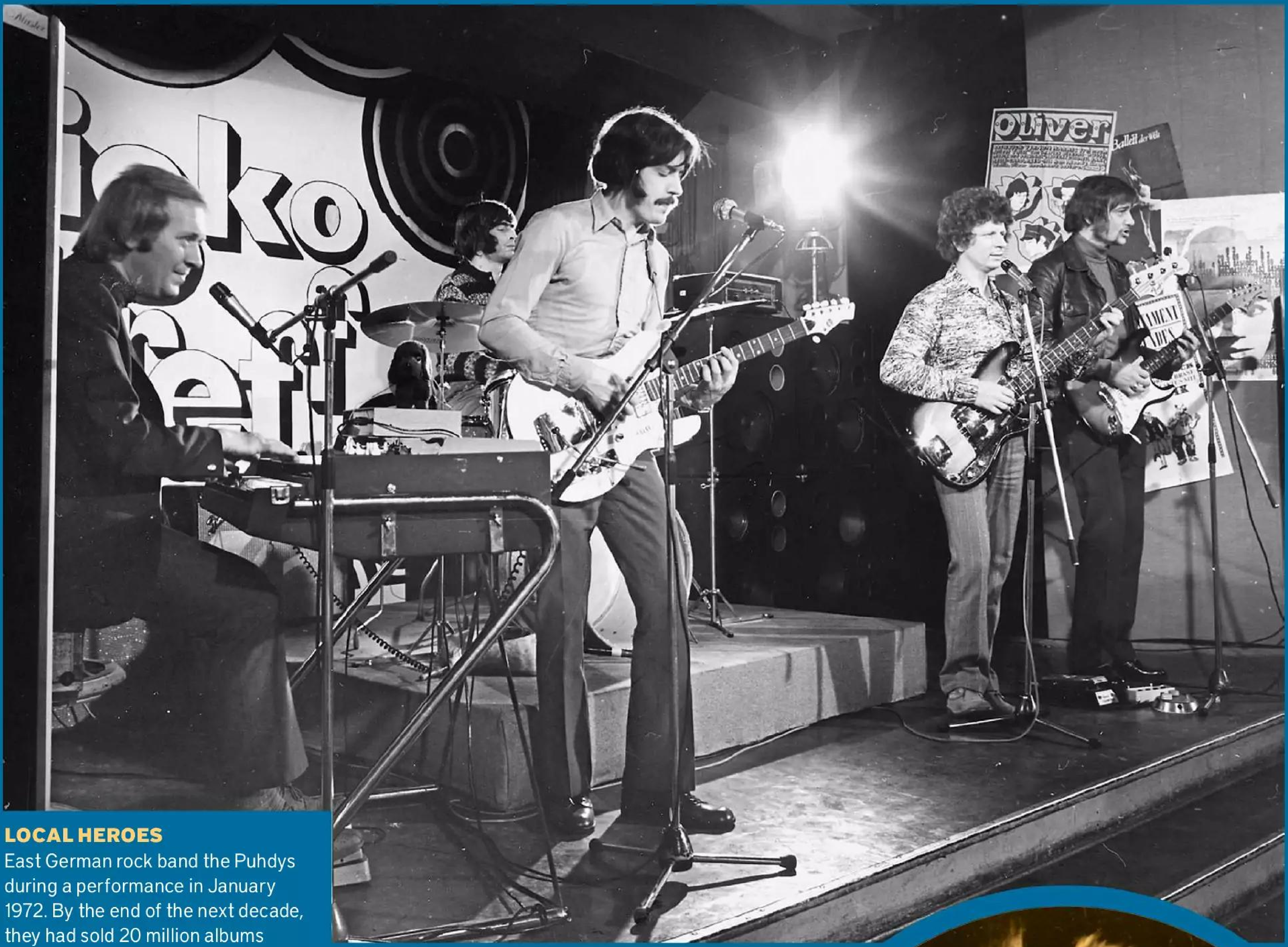

LOCAL HEROES
East German rock band the Puhdys during a performance in January 1972. By the end of the next decade, they had sold 20 million albums

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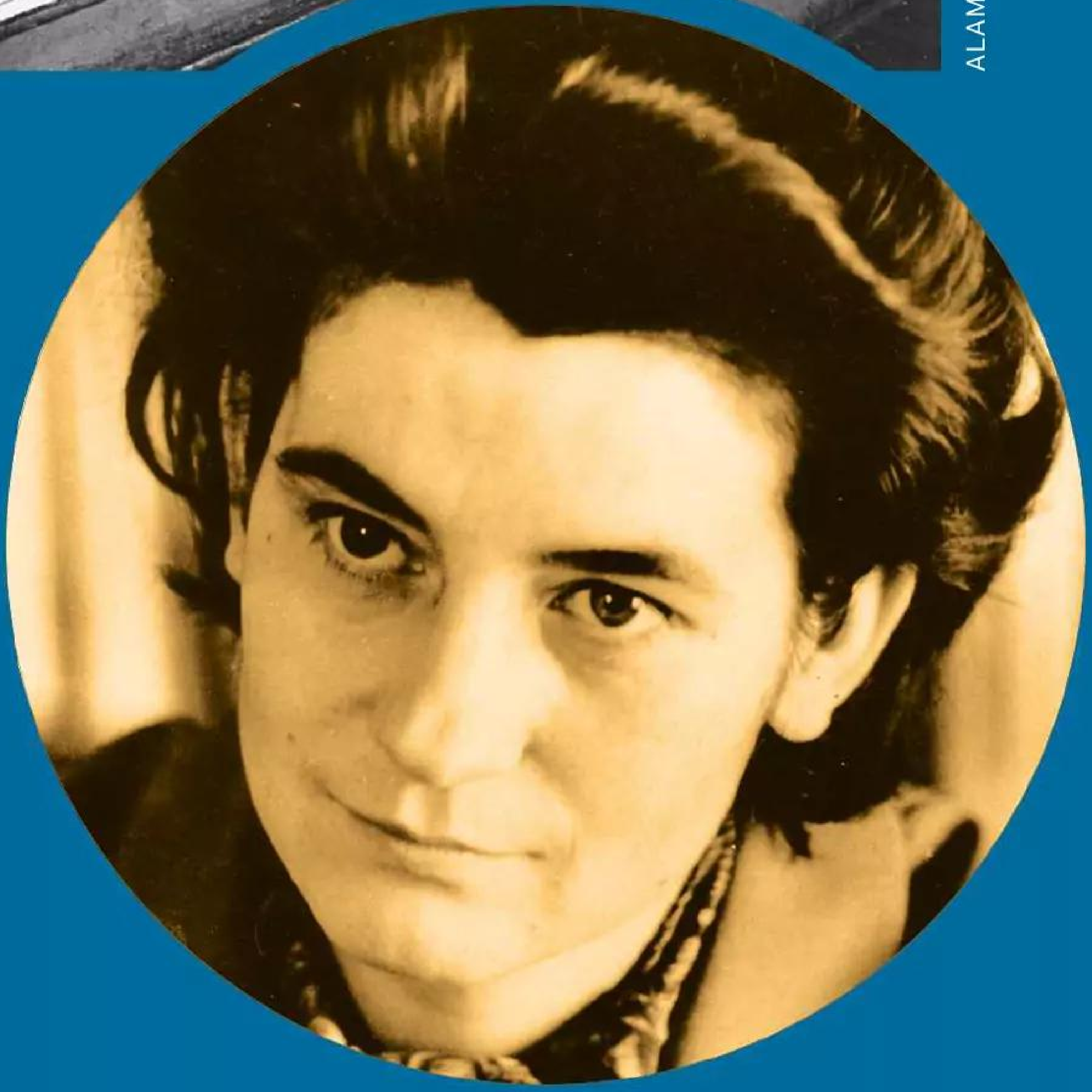


VOICE OF DISSENT
Novelist Christa Wolf in 1963, the year her book *Der geteilte Himmel* was published. It became a bestseller, despite its overt state criticism

NEW OPPORTUNITIES
Female workers at a bicycle factory in 1961, in the city today called Chemnitz. Women were increasingly encouraged to enter full-time work in East Germany

testers were killed, including some executed for their part in the uprising. One of these was a 26-year-old metalworker called Alfred Diener, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with other citizens. On 18 June 1953, he was taken to Weimar and executed.

A fractured society

The general strike of 1953, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the revolution that helped bring the wall down in 1989 are often seen as the three key points on the spectrum of oppression and resistance that defined the GDR – and there is some truth to that.

The GDR was no democracy, and its political tides were often dictated from above. From the beginning, a system of tight control was set up in line with the Soviet model. When the Ministry of State Security – better known as the Stasi – was founded in 1950, it was small. Yet it quickly began its ruthless work, with 35 prison cells in a four-storey brick building at Albrechtstraße 26 in Berlin. Within its walls, individuals including Kurt Müller, deputy leader of the KPD in West Germany, were interrogated under brutal conditions. It didn't help that Müller had been successful in rebuilding the KPD in the West, not only becoming its deputy leader but also getting elected as a communist member of parliament. Müller had become too successful at following his own, independent path to communism, and to make matters worse, someone had denounced him as having "diverting opinions", claiming that "his character was not very good".

Müller was lured under false pretences to the GDR via the still-open sector borders in Berlin, kept in horrific conditions designed to break him, then handed over to the Soviets, who sentenced him to 25 years of hard labour in Siberia. He was rescued by a deal the West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer made with Moscow, which saw German prisoners released in 1955 – but not till five long years after his capture.

The Stasi continued to meddle in all aspects of life in East Germany, using its citizens to spy on one another. By the late 1980s, the organisation had a staggering 91,000 members. It is hardly surprising that the Stasi and its long-time leader Erich Mielke bore the brunt of the frustrations that erupted in 1989, and which culminated in the mass demonstrations that helped bring down the wall. Yet even this does not reduce the GDR to a mere "Stasiland".

Nearly three decades passed between the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and its fall in 1989, and East Germans did not spend them solely in dull suffering, awaiting liberation. Life went on – and, in many ways, even flourished. The GDR was a highly literate, highly skilled and highly politicised society, confident in its achievements and keen to move forward – the very ingredients that allowed East Germans to see beyond the narrow lines prescribed by censorship and the Stasi. They produced a rich cultural landscape spanning a diverse range of artforms.

Take, for instance, Christa Wolf's much-celebrated 1963 novel *Der geteilte Himmel* ("Divided Heaven"). It describes a young couple struggling to come to terms with the moral and economic realities of the GDR. Manfred flees to West Berlin just before the wall is built, while Rita – unhappy, yet also disillusioned with the materialistic west – tries unsuccessfully to convince him to return. She attempts suicide, and the story is told from her perspective as she wakes up in hospital. Wolf was very open about the fact that the book was semi-autobiographical. Despite her overt and desperate criticism of the GDR and Germany's division, it was a bestseller in the East. It was also widely read in West Germany and translated into many foreign languages.

> **There was hope and positivity in East Germany in 1973, yet that tends to be forgotten today**

Literature wasn't the only medium that East Germans used to express themselves. Musically, too, the GDR developed distinct styles. Some were influenced by trends from the US and Britain: western music could be played in all settings, albeit only at a ratio of 60: 40 in favour of music from socialist countries. Western artists even played on state television, with Abba making an appearance on the popular entertainment show *Ein Kessel Buntes* ("A Kettle Full of Colour") in 1974.

East German musicians also produced their own style of popular music, known as "Ostrock". One of the most successful bands was the Puhdys, which by 1989 had sold 20 million albums and gained an international following. Back in 1970, while still a small pub band covering western songs, they had been banned from performing, with a state official complaining that "the titles played by the ensemble were exclusively sung in 'English'," and that "some of the 'songs' on offer were served up with screams and inarticulate noises to an audience consisting mostly of teenagers who, whipped up by the music, carried out degenerate motions". When the Puhdys promised to write their own material in German, though, they were allowed to continue. Ironically, it was this censorship that forced the band to find their own style rather than simply copy western idols. In this instance, as in many others, GDR artists worked with and around censorship to produce new material.

The Puhdys were among the bands performing at the 1973 Youth Festival. Unlike the mass gatherings of 1953 and 1989, this event does not tend to be seen as seminal for the GDR, yet it is as much part of its story as the others. It speaks of a nation that had grown out of its shaky foundation years to develop the highest living standards in the communist world. True, the GDR lagged behind the West in overall economic terms, but rent, food, public transport, childcare, healthcare and education were so heavily subsidised that the system took away the baseline concerns felt by many poorer people in western countries.

There was societal progress, too. Women were able and encouraged to work full time. People from working-class backgrounds were able to go to university or further their skills in trade and industry. All of this was set within a rigid ideological framework, yet there remained many niches for people to fill.

There was hope, creativity and positivity in 1973, yet that tends to be forgotten because it does not fit into the image we have of the vanished world behind the Iron Curtain. And in truth that year is just as atypical in the wider story of the GDR as 1953 or 1989. All three are extremes on a spectrum that saw the GDR oscillate between oppression and economic collapse at one end, and idealism and equality at the other. All represent elements of an East German kaleidoscope that featured all colours – not just shades of grey.

"Studying summitry shows us what can happen when leaders click rather than clash"

In this interview from 2016, **KRISTINA SPOHR** and **DAVID REYNOLDS** told Rob Attar about their edited volume on superpower statecraft in a dangerous world

Rob Attar The summits only really got going halfway through the Cold War. Why?

David Reynolds The word 'summit' was introduced into common parlance in the 1950s by Churchill, who wanted to have "parleys at the summit" to defuse the Cold War, but in the 50s and 60s the confrontation was still too hot. It was not until the era of détente that leaders felt they ought to meet to try to develop mutual understanding, because nuclear weapons were just too dangerous to play around with.

Kristina Spohr Another strand here is the German question at the heart of the Cold War in Europe. West Germany would not de jure recognise East Germany as a separate independent state because it wanted to keep open the option of reunification. It was not until the period of détente that the leaders of the two began to meet, with the West German chancellor Willy Brandt travelling by train to East Germany. This was really, as Brandt said, to "get a smell of each other".

DR This was a huge icebreaker at a time when there was a fundamental division between the two Germanies.

KS At one point during a meeting in Summit, Brandt went to a window and outside was a crowd shouting: "Willy! Willy! Willy!" They meant him, rather than the East German leader Willi Stoph. This spontaneous reaction by its own people shocked the East German regime.

The locations of summits were clearly important. How were they chosen?

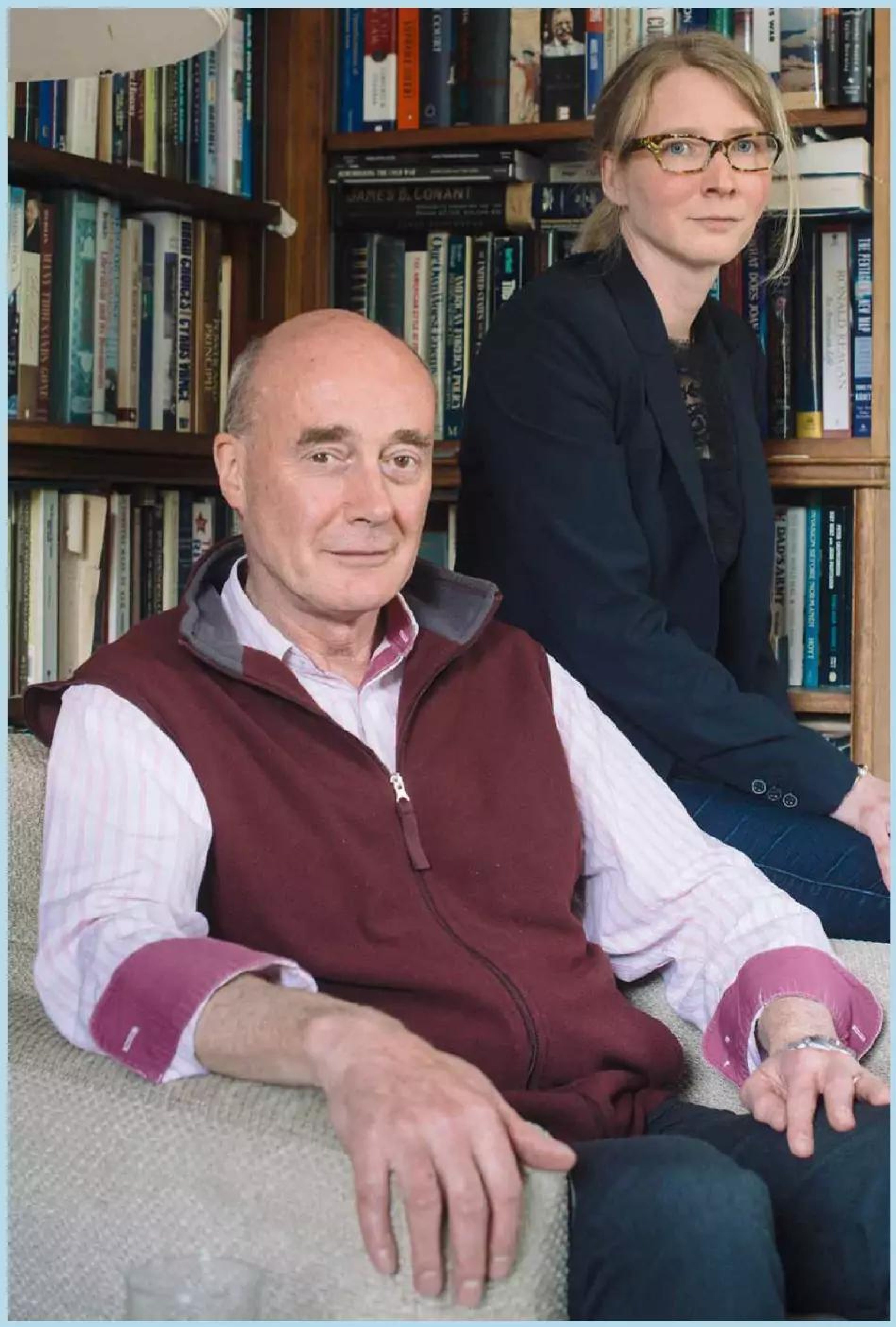
DR Sometimes there were sequences of summits, such as under Nixon and Reagan, moving from one place to another. So Nixon – the first time an American president had been to the Soviet capital – but the idea was that Brezhnev would then come to Washington. Yet location also involved issues of precedence and privilege, and that's why, for example, Reagan and Gorbachev had their first meeting in Geneva, a neutral city.

KS Some of these summits were also reconnaissance trips. Each leader was trying to find out what the other's place was like. On occasion it was better to choose a remote location. In 1979 there was a summit in Guadeloupe, so far away from the media limelight that it was almost in hiding.

What typically happened at a summit?

KS That depended very much on the summit. At Guadeloupe, for example, there were hours of meetings between US president Jimmy Carter, UK prime minister Jim Callaghan, German chancellor Helmut Schmidt and French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. They discussed world politics and security affairs, but there was also an informal aspect – they went snorkelling, sailing and jogging. It looked like a holiday – the press talked about the "swimming pool summit" – but the discussions were incredibly intense.

DR In part this also depended on the health of the leaders. For much of this period Brezhnev was a basket case: he'd had heart attacks and all sorts of problems. Everything had to be done from prompt cards. For the 1979 Vienna summit [aimed at limiting nuclear weapons] Carter was told the whole thing had to be planned in advance because if Brezhnev had to do anything spontaneous he would complete-



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: David Reynolds and Kristina Spohr; Willy Brandt is met with an enthusiastic reception as he arrives in Erfurt, East Germany, in 1970; Mikhail Gorbachev (right) invites Helmut Kohl (second from left) to visit his holiday home in July 1990; Richard Nixon makes a very public show of shaking hands with chairman Mao in 1972

IAN FARREL/GETTY IMAGES

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Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev during the 1988 Moscow summit. "[They] just clicked, which had massive implications," says David Reynolds

"News management was vital. It was possible to control the media in a way that's not true now"

ly blow it. It was very different when dealing with a leader such as Gorbachev, who was quick witted and argumentative.

The summits were very big, symbolic occasions. Was that the most important aspect of them?

DR In our book we try to emphasise the symbolic and the substantive moments, because both really matter. Undoubtedly the symbolism was very important in the 1988 Moscow summit. Five years earlier Reagan had decried the Soviet Union as "the evil empire"; then, in Red Square, he was asked if he still believed that was true. He said: "Oh, I was talking about another time, another era." That was very powerful. These opportunities for leaders to meet could be hugely important in how the world saw international relations. But substance also mattered. Reagan and Gorbachev just clicked, which had massive implications.

KS I also think about the Kohl-Gorbachev talks in July 1990. They had a very formal meeting in Moscow, then Gorbachev invited the chancellor to fly with him to the Caucasus and visit his dacha [holiday home]. No other western leader had been invited there, and though this summit was all about substance – how to wrap up German unification and the issue of Red Army withdrawal from unified Germany – it was also a very symbolic moment. The two men went together to lay wreaths at Stavropol in remembrance of the Second World War, and the two of them bonded. They felt they had a historic moment in which they could change the world.

The summits were often played out in front of a huge media apparatus. How important was public image?

DR It was very important in the 1972 Nixon-Mao summit. There was a belief in China that at the 1954 Geneva conference the then American secretary of state John Foster Dulles had refused to shake the hand of Chinese premier Zhou Enlai – a serious snub. It's not clear whether the story was true, but the important thing is that Nixon was absolutely convinced he had to deal with it. So when Air Force One lands in Beijing, Nixon came down the steps with his arm straight out the whole way – because the one thing he is going to do is shake Zhou's hand to show this is now a different era. The timings were arranged for American primetime television, for the evening news bulletins. You had to hit CBS, NBC and ABC, and if you did so, you got the message across. This was a time when news management was vital but it was also possible to control in a way that's not true now.

KS You could tell a similar story about the Kohl-Gorbachev meeting in the Caucasus. The Germans arrived with a huge media entourage. There were photographs of Gorbachev and Kohl walking by the river in the mountains, then sitting on tree trunks in their woolly jumpers. *Pravda* [the official Soviet newspaper] called it the "summit without ties". It looked and felt really informal, but it was media theatre too: the images said that these were two people getting on really well.

To what extent did summitry bring about the end of the Cold War?

DR If you try to play counterfactuals, the Soviet system was clearly increasingly rickety in the 1980s but probably would have carried on for an indefinite period of time. Gorbachev was undoubtedly a crucial element: mixing vision, impatience for change, and a naivety about what would happen. None of the changes in eastern Europe would have occurred if he hadn't signalled that they wouldn't be crushed by the Red Army.

HEIGHT OF WAR A huge missile crosses Red Square, Moscow, on 9 May 1965, as part of the Victory Day Parade. "In the 1950s and 1960s the confrontation was still too hot," says Reynolds

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

INFORMAL GATHERING
Dubbed "the swimming pool summit", the 1979 Guadeloupe meeting saw the four leaders – left to right: Helmut Schmidt, James Callaghan, Jimmy Carter and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing – go snorkelling and sailing. But discussions were "incredibly intense"

GETTY IMAGES

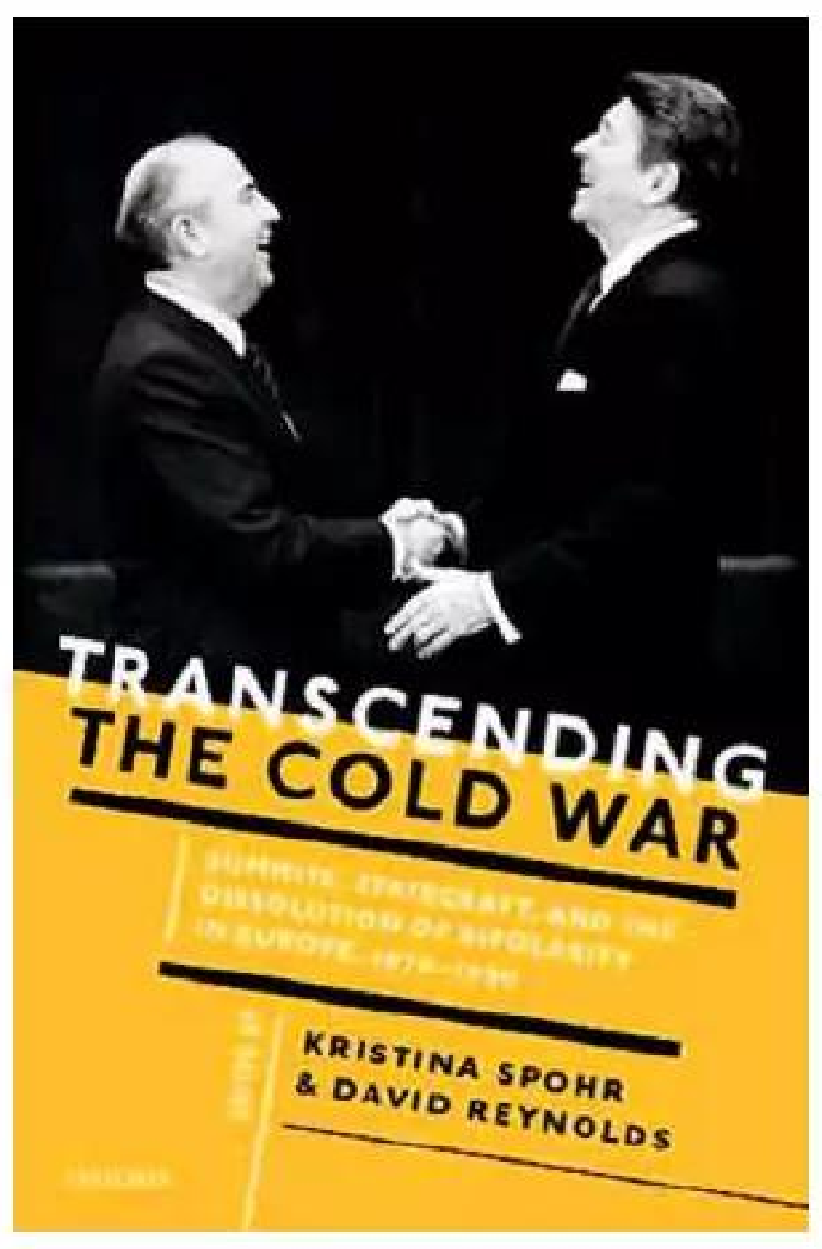
But summits also matter. Reagan and Gorbachev shared a basic belief that the nuclear arms race could be curbed. In the book we emphasise the importance of the 1987 Washington summit, which was the first time the superpowers actually reduced their nuclear arsenals, showing the arms race was not going to spiral out of control. We also emphasise that German reunification, potentially a huge tinderbox, was handled by leaders in a responsible way. Here are two really important moments in which you need to look at summitry to explain why the Cold War ended the way it did, without a major conflict in the heart of Europe.

KS We must remember that the Chinese employed force [at Tiananmen Square in June 1989] and that there was a fear that the same might happen in East Germany. Even at the Malta summit in December 1989, George HW Bush was still trying to get assurances from Gorbachev that the Soviets would not apply force. At the time the Berlin Wall came down, Bush had written in his notebook: "Tiananmen, Tiananmen, Tiananmen". There was a great fear of the Red Army being let loose in East Germany. A lot of Americans were asking Bush why he wasn't jumping up and down on the Berlin Wall; he said that "this was not the time to stick our fingers in the eyes of Mikhail Gorbachev."

Were leaders at the summits aiming to end the Cold War or just cope with it?

KS We see three separate phases of summitry. The first, in the early 1970s, was really about thawing the Cold War; the end point – for example, German reunification – just seemed so far away. There was a real fear at the time that World War Three could break out. Then, in the mid-1970s, there were ideas of how to make the Cold War liveable. After that, though, superpower relations got much worse, sparking a second Cold War. Finally, we get to our third part, transcending the Cold War. It started with the creative spark that happened with Gorbachev and Reagan and opened up new perspectives. They didn't think, though, that the Cold War would be over in five years. They were really focusing on curbing nuclear weapons.

DR We often asked each other: what did X think was going to happen in the Cold War in the next 20 or 30 years? What is clear is that the events of 1989–91 were amazing for most people. It's fascinating to look at what happens when leaders suddenly see doors opening in all directions. How do they respond? This was a period of historic change, like 1815, 1918 and 1945 – except it didn't involve a major war. The huge political and social changes occurred largely peacefully because, we argue, they were managed cooperatively by the leaders at the top. What intrigues us about summitry is what happens when leaders click, rather than clash, and how they can then shape history in a positive way. ●



Transcending the Cold War: Summits, Statecraft, and the Dissolution of Bipolarity in Europe, 1970–1990
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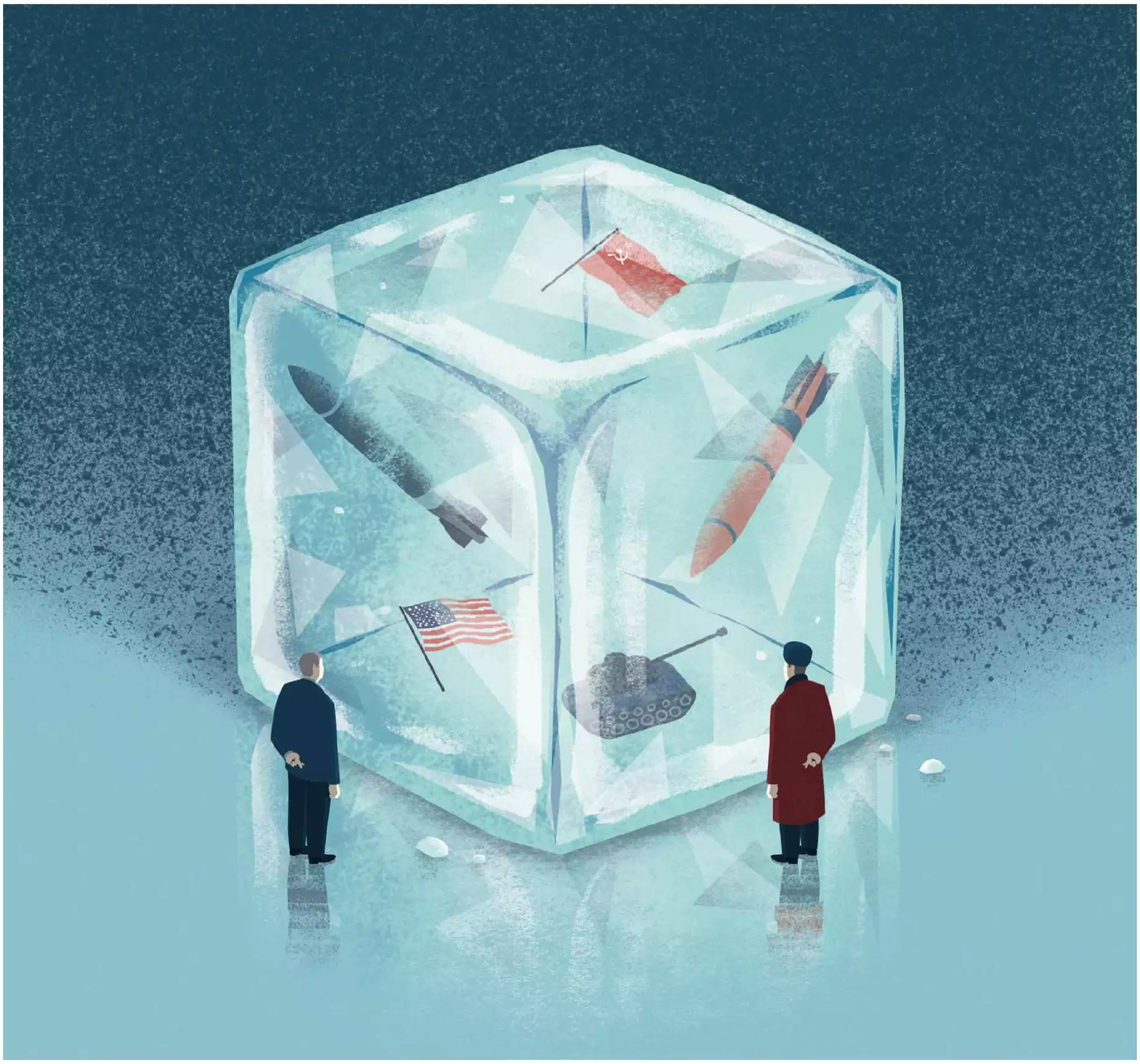

“Many of the problems we wrestle with today have their roots in the chaotic way the Cold War ended. It contained many seeds of our present discontents”

DAVID REYNOLDS

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